

Public Policy Agenda



2022

RESILIENCE
ADVOCATES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE™

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Background

Resilience: Advocates for Ending Violence was founded by grassroots activists in 1977 as Center for Women in Transition, an organization dedicated to addressing the needs of domestic violence survivors and their children in West Michigan. From the beginning, Resilience incorporated a coordinated community response to domestic and sexual violence. This approach was critical for both the safety of survivors and for holding abusers accountable for violent behavior. It also set the stage for the prevention and systems change efforts that would challenge the laws and sociocultural values that perpetuated domestic and sexual violence.

Resilience has dedicated much of the energy of the last 40+ years to creating and nurturing strong and lasting local partnerships. We have looked to the Michigan Coalition the End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV) to keep the agency abreast of legislative issues that require our collective voice. We have taken cues from national organizations to inform us of action needed around massive bill packages that impact the lives of survivors. Resilience staff and volunteers have been involved locally-working closely with leaders in homelessness prevention to make changes to zoning ordinances, speaking up against discrimination, meeting with elected officials, and showing up as boots-on-the-ground social justice activists. Until recently, we lacked capacity to expand our legislative advocacy efforts and much of our involvement with policy issues has been piecemeal; mostly taking reactive measures when issues were imminent due to time and funding constraints.

The Survivor Advisory Council

The agency's formal commitment to legislative advocacy was driven by the Survivor Advisory Council. Formed in 2018 as a subcommittee of the agency's board of directors, its purpose is to bring together a diverse group of domestic and sexual violence survivors in an effort to elevate their voices. The vision is to create space for survivors to identify the issues that were of value to them; to inform decisions about programming and provide feedback into the direction of services. The hope is that participation on the Survivor Advisory Council is both empowering to participants by creating solidarity and community while at the same time providing a platform for survivors. Themes began to arise early in group's development. Many group members had negative and often life-shattering experiences with the court process. Members voiced a desire to support other survivors through this process, to be publicly visible, to educate the community on the prevalence and dynamics of intimate partner violence, and ultimately to influence public policy.

C O V I D - 1 9 P a n d e m i c

Over the last two years, communities everywhere confronted unspeakable hardships. Globally, there were marked increases in both the frequency and severity of violence at home. Domestic violence was labelled "the pandemic within the pandemic." At Resilience, the demand for services was overwhelming. Emergency shelter requests reached the highest numbers we've seen since first opening our doors nearly 45 years ago. The need to focus on policy advocacy was more pressing than ever. Creating a public policy agenda that we could rally around, share widely, and use as a tool to determine where we wanted to devote our energy was a clear next step.

The Process...

To gather feedback from stakeholders-staff, board members, and survivors-a series of four Think Tanks were held in 2021. Each virtual session used a SCOT analysis (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) to gather input into the Policy Agenda. Each Think Tank focused on a specific area from the agency's system change plan. Patterns were identified and grouped into priority areas. Input from the Survivor Advisory Council helped to further define the language and recommendations.

Priority Areas

The following five priority areas emerged from the four Think Tank Sessions:

SAFE & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**YOUTH PREVENTION
PROGRAMMING**

COURT REFORM

**OFFICER TRAINING
& ACCOUNTABILITY**

EQUITY & INCLUSION



SAFE & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We support policies to prevent and address homelessness; ensuring such policies contain specific provisions for safe and affordable housing for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

A photograph of three young people, two men and one woman, looking at a book together. The woman in the center is wearing a colorful, patterned beanie with white fur trim. The man on the right is pointing at the book. The man on the left is looking down at a book. The image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

YOUTH PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

We work to ensure access to educational programming for youth that promotes consent, respectful relationships, and healthy masculinity.



COURT REFORM

We seek to reform court policies and processes that re-victimize survivors and fail to protect their safety. Of particular interest are those pertaining to:

- Child Custody
- Personal Protection Orders
- Divorce
- Confidentiality



OFFICER TRAINING & ACCOUNTABILITY

We support efforts to ensure that local law enforcement is equipped to, and held accountable for, responding to domestic and sexual violence victims with discretion and consistency.

A photograph of four young women of diverse backgrounds sitting on a stone ledge, laughing and smiling. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The women are dressed in casual, contemporary clothing. The background is a light-colored stone wall.

EQUITY & INCLUSION

We recognize that all forms of oppression and social injustice are interconnected and overlapping. We support legislative efforts that advance equity and inclusion in education, housing, employment, healthcare, and access to community resources.

Great Lakes Model of Survivor Accompaniment

Resilience upholds the Great Lakes Model of Survivor Accompaniment, developed by the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence. This model provides guidance for reviewing and making recommendations regarding policies and proposals; ensuring they are:

SURVIVOR-CENTERED

- Self-determination
- Safety
- Privacy
- Offender accountability

INTERSECTIONAL

- Racial equity
- Accessibility
- Economic justice
- Anti-discrimination

TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Application of evidence based practices
- Account for lived experiences of survivors

Federal & State Policy Issues

In addition to the priority areas identified, Resilience will continue to monitor and take action on the following as needed:

VAWA: The fundamental goals of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 are to prevent violent crime, respond to the needs of crime victims, and change public attitudes through a collaborative effort by the criminal justice system, social service agencies, research organizations, schools, public health organizations, and private organizations.

FVPSA: The Family Violence Prevention & Services Act is the primary federal funding stream dedicated to the support of emergency shelter and related assistance for victims of domestic violence and their children.

VOCA: The Victims of Crime Act provides funds to states for victim assistance and compensation programs that offer support and services to those affected by violent crimes. Resilience, like many organizations who serve survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking, relies on VOCA for staffing as well as direct and indirect support for life-saving, around-the-clock services.

Gun Safety Laws: Abusers with firearms are five times more likely to kill their victims. The presence of a gun further exacerbates the power and control dynamic used by abusers to inflict emotional abuse and exert coercive control over their partners. Supporting federal and state policies and practices that disrupt abusers' access to guns can save lives.

Recommendations for Implementation & Engagement

- Create Resilience Action Alert emails with simple directions for contacting legislators
- Craft streamlined messages to elected officials that can be easily duplicated for use in emails, letters, and phone calls
- Use social media platforms to educate stakeholders on policy issues
- Attend community meetings, take an active role on local and state committees and task forces
- Partner with local and regional programs; combine efforts to raise awareness, be a resource
- Table at events, attend relevant rallies and public demonstrations
- Invite elected officials to Resilience events; to tour the program office, and meet with staff and survivors
- Promote the agency as a resource to elected officials and publicly thank them when they show support for survivors
- Position Resilience as the local expert on issues related to domestic and sexual violence
- Incorporate survivors' voices whenever possible
- Make ongoing efforts to ensure that our actions are amplifying survivors' voices; not controlling the narrative or speaking on behalf of survivors or marginalized communities

Recommendations for Implementation & Engagement

- Be intentional about inviting BIPOC survivors to the conversation and creating space for leadership opportunities
- Use trauma-informed practices when gathering stories and counter-stories
- Make the agency's policy priorities available to the public; distribute the Policy Agenda to stakeholders
- Invite community members and partner organizations to join us in taking action
- Embed public policy work in all aspects of the agency's services and programs, including new staff and volunteer training
- Provide ongoing education to staff and stakeholders about civic engagement; continue efforts to further "demystify" legislative advocacy
- Incorporate policy work into the agency's strategic plan and systems change plan
- Create strategies to support and expand the agency's policy work: seek unrestricted funding streams; explore intern and volunteer opportunities in social justice and systems change
- Promote opportunities for survivors to register to vote and have access to the polls.

Special Thanks to:

Blake Andrea
Ortencia Bos
Elizabeth Burnett
Barb Clymer
Lesley Coghill
Adrienne Field
Shannon Garrett
Megan Hennessey
Brad Hieftje
Elinor Jordan
Megan Lang
Beth Larsen
Camelia Lonsway
Jeff Lukas
Sherry Martens
Jan Meinel
Brandon Melnyk
Christina Scarpino
Nicole Shosten

Survivor Advisory Council Members: K, S, B, and G

Sources

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Free & confidential support for domestic and sexual violence

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