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EMBARGOED UNTIL JULY 11

[CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, July 11, 2022] – The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence released the 2022 edition of “Measuring Safety,” a report tracking domestic violence, sexual violence, and survivors’ experiences with service providers in Illinois. While Illinois’ population is increasing and contacts to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline went up by 9% to over 32,000 in 2021, the number of survivors reaching out to law enforcement continues to decline, down 5% in the last year. This decline appears to stem from adverse experiences survivors face with law enforcement, the legal system, and family regulation system. The report examines subsidized housing and public benefits, finding that survivors are often unable to access these resources. Strikingly, only 86 public housing applicants who are domestic violence survivors were housed in 2022, less than 6% of the survivors who applied. Instead, community-based programs that build a safety net for survivors and their families are particularly valuable in helping survivors heal and access critical resources.

Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data gathered from survivor interviews, gender-based violence service providers, and public sector agencies, including the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline, local and state police, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the Cook County Department of Public Health, and the Chicago Housing Authority, **the report offers four key recommendations:**

- 1. Sustain increased financial investments in gender-based violence services.** Illinois and the City of Chicago made historic investments of \$70.9 million and \$35 million, respectively, in work to eliminate gender-based violence in 2021, which should be sustained to ensure the programs that are working can be funded and expanded.
- 2. Prioritize direct, community-based services.** Community-based services have proved most beneficial to survivors because they are trauma-informed, offer wrap-around services (such as childcare, economic assistance, and community-building), and have fewer barriers to access than public programs.
- 3. Utilize awareness campaigns to connect survivors to community-based resources.** Ninety percent of survivors interviewed were unfamiliar with community-based resources. Awareness campaigns are vital so that survivors can access these services.
- 4. Increase gender-based violence data collection and availability.** Limited data collection on gender-based violence means this sector is often unable to support the full range of survivors’ needs and successfully advocate for these needs.

Violence continues to increase in Illinois. Black survivors are vastly overrepresented relative to their population demographics, due in large part to the intersections of state and systemic violence. A total of 121 domestic violence-related shootings occurred in Chicago in 2021, according to the Chicago Police Department. Over 86% of people killed in domestic violence-related homicides were Black. Notably, efforts to revoke firearms are not working. Just 27% of

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those whose FOID cards were revoked turned in firearm disposition records in 2021, leaving thousands of guns unaccounted for.

When police are involved in domestic violence cases, survivors' experiences are overwhelmingly negative. In interviews, survivors told us, "[I was] met with denial and accused of lying," "[I] just wish that law enforcement took this a lot more seriously," and "I feel very cynical and just devastated that this is how this process works." While many survivors state that they do not wish to see the person causing harm incarcerated, but rather simply have the violence stop, societal responses to gender-based violence remain centered around punitive measures for those causing harm.

In contrast, community-based programs appear to be deeply beneficial for survivors, though many would benefit from expansion. One survivor reflected on wrap-around community resources: "If I hadn't received services; I would still be living with that violence. I have more goals, more dreams because I am more empowered."

Access and funding to secure safe housing are significant barriers for many. In 2021, 4,452 survivors in Illinois were turned away from domestic violence shelters due to lack of space. With recent increases in State and City funding, many providers are working to expand the number of beds they can offer. Financial abuse occurs in more than 99% of gender-based violence cases, according to a 2021 estimate by the California State University at Long Beach. Last year in Illinois, 42% of survivors served throughout the state reported an income of \$500 or less per month, demonstrating the gravity of economic need among survivors. A small number of flexible financial assistance programs exist in Chicagoland, though inconsistent sources of funding mean these are often unavailable. The Network's Crisis Response Fund distributed \$463,214 in 2020 to support survivors with housing, utilities, and other barriers to accessing safety.

"Addressing the survivor as a whole person—one who is parenting, growing up surrounded by violence, in need of economic assistance, and may require mental or physical health care—is critical," says Olivia Farrell, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Research at The Network.

About The Network:

The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence is a collective of 40+ non-profit organizations that serve those affected by gender-based violence in the Chicagoland area. The Network provides training, data reports and public policy advocacy in addition to connecting community members with direct service providers. Members offer shelter, 24-hour crisis hotlines, legal advocacy, counseling and violence prevention programs. To learn more, visit <https://the-network.org/>.

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