Statement from The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence on The City of Chicago’s 2023 Budget Recommendations

The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence has assessed Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s 2023 Budget Recommendations and finds that they do not meet the needs of gender-based violence (GBV) survivors and service providers. The following statement addresses the proposed allocations, current challenges in accessing funds, and the growing demand for services in Chicago.

In 2021, the GBV community was thrilled to receive a promise of $20 million in new funding for services through the City’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation and an additional $5 million in bond funds. While $18 million have been allocated to GBV programs for this year, as of early October 2022 and the release of the Chicago Recovery Plan Progress Report, $0 have been distributed to any ARPA-funded GBV program providers.

The 2023 budget recommendations include a $2.4 million increase in GBV program funding. However, it is difficult to celebrate this increase when providers do not have the funds in hand to provide essential services. Critically, we need to maintain these funds when ARPA funds are expended and the Budget Recommendations do not make this guarantee. Agencies cannot make sustainable, strategic decisions about their programming without certainty that this increase in support will continue. Nor can they report on their program outcomes until they have the funds needed to provide services. Until the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) establishes more efficient practices for RFP processes and paying its delegate agencies, survivors will continue to be put on waitlists, turned away from services, and forced to remain in unsafe situations.

The Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline staff have received a 100% increase in contacts over the past four years, with contacts expected to exceed a record-breaking 40,000 this year.¹ The Hotline staff have not received any pay increases during this time nor has the Hotline received an adequate increase in funding to scale up its operations, despite repeatedly demonstrating a clear need to DFSS. DFSS has recently celebrated a roughly $270,000 increase in funds for the Hotline. Unfortunately, though, this is a fraction of what was requested or is needed to provide these dedicated advocates with adequate pay. The Hotline needs staff raises to ensure staff earn a living wage and can be retained; increased funds for raising public awareness about the Hotline throughout the community; financial support for special programs, including hotel and transportation assistance for survivors; and an office space suitable for engaging in challenging, trauma-informed work.

Chicago’s survivors cannot wait for services. 2021 saw a 64% increase in domestic violence-related shootings throughout the City.² Shooting rates have remained alarmingly high in 2022.³ More programming—supported by the City through reducing administrative burdens, introducing smoother payment processes, and increasing funding for delegate agencies—is necessary to meet the growing and urgent need to support survivors whose lives are on the line.

¹ Network analysis of Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline Data obtained through the internal database, iCarol, October, 2022.
² Data provided by the Chicago Police Department, Strategic Initiatives Division, Data Analytics Unit through a Freedom of Information Act request, March, 2022.
In response to the Mayor’s Budget Recommendations, The Network requests the following:

- We request a 20% increase in program funding through all funding sources, integrated into the main budget, a total of $7 million.
- We request a guarantee that ARPA allocations will be incorporated into the general budget following the end of ARPA distribution.
- We request an evaluation of city processes for distributing funding to contract recipients, with an action plan to expedite these processes.
- We request $1.2 million for the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline to increase staff pay, expand public awareness campaigns, and strengthen vital programs. We also request that staff be allowed to relocate to an office environment conducive to providing trauma-informed care, specifically in the building where the rest of the Network staff works.

The work of supporting survivors and service providers does not end with assigning them a line in the budget. We need timely, effective, and responsive systems from the City to allocate adequate funds, distribute them promptly, and ensure that the staff providing these essential services are supported themselves. A vote on the final budget is expected in mid-November.