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The Network reached out to Republican candidate, Bob Fiortetti, but did not receive a response.
Throughout Illinois law, survivors of gender-based violence are identified as "special victims" given the nature and intricacy of these cases. How will your administration prioritize cases of violence against women, girls and femme identifying individuals? What are your plans to specifically tackle these issues?

I am committed to protecting the most vulnerable members of our community, including survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. I will work to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and will center survivors in the pursuit of protection and accountability for harm caused.

I will collaborate with local organizations and law enforcement to strengthen protections for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and hold abusers accountable.

My vision for the State's Attorney's Office includes a comprehensive approach to public safety, in which I will prioritize the prosecution of domestic violence and sexual assault cases and work to ensure survivors receive the protection and support they deserve. I will focus on gender-based violence (GBV) resentencing, felony review screening of cases for GBV impact, the restoration and expansion of the Targeted Abuser Call (TAC) to ensure wraparound services, and survivor/trauma-informed training for attorneys and victims witness staff. I will ensure that ASAs working on these issues are appropriately trained to recognize that GBV also impacts men, transgender, and non-binary victims.

The Cook County State's Attorney and gender-based violence advocates have a long history of collaborating to address issues and support survivors through their criminal cases. Will you commit to working with the gender-based violence community to address issues with advocates while working on cases? How will you improve communication with advocates?

Absolutely. I am committed to working together with advocates and will ensure that the leadership of our Domestic Violence Division sets up a regular cadence of meetings with advocates to ensure smooth communication and address any policy concerns together. A Gender Based Violence Policy Roundtable that regularly revisits issues centering emerging best practices, and updates ongoing training for all personnel interacting with survivors, is necessary. I would like to create a survivor leader working group where survivors are directly advising the office on policies and practices. Survivor leadership, and centering the voices of those most impacted, is important both in terms of accountability and reform.

The advocacy community seeks to end the practice of arresting, charging and detaining victims of domestic violence and human trafficking who were acting in self-defense or under coercion of their abuser, especially cases involving homicide or attempted homicide cases. Please share an outline of policies and/or steps you would take as Cook County State's Attorney to ensure your office does not criminalize survivors of gender based violence.

Criminalizing survivors of GBV does not serve justice and is a poor use of our office's limited resources. I would ensure all felony review prosecutors are trained to screen for history of GBV, both from the alleged defendant’s standpoint and the victim’s standpoint, to identify opportunities for community-based intervention instead of criminal action. As we pursue this work, we must keep top of mind that the carceral system has in many instances failed to serve and protect Black and Brown individuals, and that we must remain committed to addressing deeply rooted systemic harm.
4. **Reports of sexual assault to police have increased in recent years; however, the number of reported cases that result in prosecution are incredibly small. What will you do to help increase the number of sexual assaults complaints that are prosecuted by your office?**

Across GBV cases, my office will work to create vertical prosecutions, aiming to ensure that the same prosecutor(s) and investigator(s) will be working with the survivor from beginning to end of a case. That personnel will have specialized training in sexual assault, implicit bias, and culturally responsive prosecution. I will also ensure we assign a liaison to area campuses to guarantee that appropriate resources and training are the baseline. We will support the passage and implementation of laws that include coercive control as elements of sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking charges.

5. **We have seen a trend of gender-based violence offenses being dismissed, reduced or pleaded down to simple offenses. How will you address this? How will your office communicate charging and plea decisions to victims?**

The Victim Witness Unit (VWU) of the State’s Attorney’s Office has faced repeated cuts in funding due to federal funding cuts and budgetary pressures. We will prioritize restoring staffing levels to the VWU both via the county budget and focused grant proposals. As the unit’s staffing returns to appropriate levels, we will also focus on ensuring appropriate training and support for VWU staff to ensure the highest level of support for victims, while also acknowledging the challenges of the role and the need for support for those supporting survivors.

6. **How will your office balance building relationships with local law enforcement to prosecute crimes while also holding law enforcement accountable when they commit an act of gender-based violence?**

We all need our police to be honest and to testify truthfully, so we are going to hold police accountable. I will prosecute police officers who abuse their power, perpetrate gender-based or other acts of violence, and violate people’s rights. And I’ll refuse to use the testimony of officers who have lied under oath or otherwise shown they are not credible witnesses. We’ll keep them off the stand to protect the integrity of our criminal justice system. We will also create a safe method for officers to report inappropriate behavior by their colleagues to ensure that good officers are not afraid to report those causing harm. We will build on the current SAO Police Misconduct reporting system to build trust with Cook County residents, especially those most impacted by police misconduct. We will partner with law enforcement agencies in Cook County to ensure they have internal policies/directives on Officer-Involved GBV, and that those directives are grounded in best practices that are trauma-informed and survivor-centered.

7. **The office’s current publication of felony cases related to gender-based violence cases allow the community to better understand and meet the needs of survivors. Will your office prioritize data accessibility for misdemeanor and felony cases?**

Yes, our commitment is to transparency and collaboration with the survivor community.
To improve staffing, we’ll take a two-pronged approach– recruiting the next generation, while retaining the team members we already have. When it comes to recruitment, I will personally speak at every major Midwest law school as part of a hiring strategy. We will publish openings on hiring platforms like LinkedIn and Indeed and create a relocation bonus to attract the best prosecutors from across the country. We’ll compensate our summer law clerks, and if they are successful, we’ll work to offer them jobs at the end of the summer.

When it comes to retention, I’ll fight for resources to raise the pay of every ASA to align compensation with their peers in the public and private sectors. I’ll invest in mental health services for the prosecutors and staff who every day interact with some of the most heinous crimes. And we’ll appropriately compensate prosecutors who give up their time to work weekends and holidays. We’ll also invest in paralegals and support staff. I want our prosecutors to focus on trial strategy, not making copies and going through hundreds of hours of videos.

Further, I hope to secure funding to return the TAC unit to full capacity, which will help create support systems for survivors. We will ensure specialized training for anyone assigned to SA/DV units, and beef up the Grants Unit to maximize access to alternative funding sources for staffing and support.

How will your office recruit and retain skilled assistant states attorneys and ensure the SADV division is fully staffed and supported in the work they do? How will you ensure staffing levels for all other relevant positions in the division are staffed up and trained?

Anyone assigned to SA/DV/HT will receive extensive annual training, regardless of their role in the office. We will partner with the Cook County Human Trafficking Task Force closely to identify additional training opportunities on human trafficking.

How will you ensure that the assistant state’s attorneys assigned to prosecute gender based violence cases have the knowledge, experience and skills to effectively screen, charge, and prosecute cases? How will you ensure this for other relevant positions including victim witness assistants and investigators?

Recently, decisions to detain offenders in initial appearance court on domestic violence cases have been overturned on appeal due to insufficient evidence and reasoning provided by the State’s Attorney. How will you ensure that your office sufficiently documents the rationale for pretrial detention or less restrictive measures in case filings?

The Pre-Trial Fairness Act has been in effect for about 4 months. We are watching closely to ensure that implementation meets the expectations of the law. We will closely monitor detention hearings to identify training needs and will compile data to ensure that any changes to the legislation are tailored specifically to address issues such as these that are identified in the implementation process.
The CCSAO was a leader in changing the way we look at human trafficking as a country, especially within our criminal justice system. Ensuring that there are adequate resources for survivors escaping trafficking is critical, as is faithful adherence to principles of bodily autonomy and safety. We intend to continue to pursue best practices in the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases, both in sex and labor trafficking, whether in our prosecutorial practices or in the policy changes we support at the county and state levels. We will collaborate across government agencies, such as the Department of Labor, to better identify and address patterns of harm, exploitation, and trafficking.

**Given the ongoing crisis of domestic violence involving firearm cases, the domestic violence community has been pushing legislation to address the removal of firearms in both civil and criminal orders of protection. Will your administration publicly commit to supporting Karina’s bill (SB2633/HB4469) which is expected to be taken up by the Illinois General Assembly? What steps will your office take to address domestic violence homicides generally, as well as those involving a firearm?**

Yes, absolutely, I hope to be involved in the implementation of Karina’s Law when the General Assembly passes it this year. If it is not enacted by the time I take office, it will be a top priority of my policy team to ensure its passage.

Proper training, collaboration with law enforcement and advocates, and legislation that helps prevent domestic violence homicides are all part of my plan to support survivors and reduce instances of domestic violence in Cook County. I will make sure all DV ASAs and community organizations understand the Order of Protection (OOP) process so they can properly support a survivor’s request for an OOP. Additionally, I will advocate that OOPs become part of an offender’s criminal history, not just a violation of the order, but the order itself.
Throughout Illinois law, survivors of gender-based violence are identified as “special victims” given the nature and intricacy of these cases. How will your administration prioritize cases of violence against women, girls and femme identifying individuals? What are your plans to specifically tackle these issues?

As a woman who has navigated legal proceedings my entire life as a prosecutor, defense attorney, and judge, I have a deep understanding of the complexities and seriousness of gender-based violence cases. To prioritize these cases, my administration will implement a comprehensive strategy that includes specialized training programs for law enforcement and legal professionals, the establishment of dedicated units within the prosecutor's office, and collaborative partnerships with community organizations and support services. Additionally, we will focus on proactive prevention efforts targeting the root causes of gender-based violence. Our goal is to create a safer, more equitable society in Illinois, where survivors are supported and justice is pursued vigorously.

The Cook County State’s Attorney and gender-based violence advocates have a long history of collaborating to address issues and support survivors through their criminal cases. Will you commit to working with the gender-based violence community to address issues with advocates while working on cases? How will you improve communication with advocates?

Yes. I am a staunch advocate of forming partnerships with community organizations, including gender-based violence community organizations, and commit to using their expertise to address critical issues and provide comprehensive support for survivors navigating the criminal justice system. As State’s Attorney, I will prioritize the creation of open channels for dialogue, ensuring that advocates have a direct line of communication to share their insights, concerns, and recommendations. Furthermore, structured feedback mechanisms will be implemented to continually solicit input from advocates, enabling us to promptly and effectively address emerging issues. Through the cultivation of a culture rooted in collaboration and transparency, we aim to fortify our collective endeavors in combating gender-based violence and ensuring that survivors receive the requisite support and access to justice they rightfully deserve.

The advocacy community seeks to end the practice of arresting, charging and detaining victims of domestic violence and human trafficking who were acting in self-defense or under coercion of their abuser, especially cases involving homicide or attempted homicide cases. Please share an outline of policies and/or steps you would take as Cook County State’s Attorney to ensure your office does not criminalize survivors of gender based violence.

Criminalizing survivors serves no purpose in administering justice in Cook County and I will make sure that the law does not further victimize or retraumatize them. We must be mindful of all the facts and circumstances in a case and make decisions thoughtfully within that context. I will make sure our attorneys are well-trained in the law and familiar with the experience of domestic violence survivors. They will be focused on the perpetrators of crime that are a danger to the community. That involves a robust curriculum taught by experienced legal professionals such as retired judges, and informed by what academic studies, professional experience, and common sense show us what works and what doesn’t in law enforcement.
My first priority is to address a severe staffing shortage that handcuffs the office from effective prosecution. By creating a robust restorative justice bureau that tackles non-violent offenses and recruits a brand new type of attorney to the office, it frees up resources for the felony prosecutor division to go after violent crime and specialize in cases that don’t receive the proper attention.

That, unfortunately, is the case with sexual assault. It has become too common and has earned an unfortunate reputation that, “nobody will do anything about it, so what’s the point of reporting it?” With attorneys trained to look for the telltale signs of assault and committed to convincing victims that assaults won’t be swept under the run, we can change the dynamic on this issue.

I prosecuted several cases of teen girls who were sexually assaulted. It is not only important to build trust between the prosecutor and the victim, it is important that the victim receives the support and resources to deal with the psychological and physical ramifications of this type of trauma.

We have seen a trend of gender-based violence offenses being dismissed, reduced or pleaded down to simple offenses. How will you address this? How will your office communicate charging and plea decisions to victims?

First, we have to recognize the peril and trauma victims of gender-based violence are often putting themselves in by coming forward. As mentioned above, my top priority will be to tackle the severe staffing shortage and use the new structure to have attorneys specialize in cases that have historically proven difficult without intensive focus and extraordinary care by our teams. Further, we have to make sure that our Victim Witness Unit is properly staffed so that there is a constant stream of communication about the case so that victims are well-informed. That way, when decisions are made, victims will feel they have been provided the complete picture.

How will your office balance building relationships with local law enforcement to prosecute crimes while also holding law enforcement accountable when they commit an act of gender-based violence?

Law enforcement is a crucial partner with the State’s Attorney’s office to successfully prosecute criminal offenders. They are the main if not the only witness in each and every case. They will also provide most of the evidence in a case. But if they run afoul of the law, then they harm the State’s Attorney’s effectiveness in court and with a jury. Therefore, I will have a fully integrated training program for our attorneys that involves law enforcement officials so that they understand the law in each and every case. There will be clear protocols and comprehensive training programs to address and prevent gender-based violence by law enforcement officers and if they violate them or engage in any misconduct, they will be held accountable. Police officers who break the law should face the same accountability as any defendant.
Yes. Kim Foxx’s office has been a national leader in data transparency and I commend her for that focus. I will continue that policy with an eye toward improving it for various items in a case whose status could speed up the criminal justice process. For example, if there is a severe rape kit analysis backlog, we should be able to display processing times and completions in a manner that highlights the problem to the public.

How will your office recruit and retain skilled assistant states attorneys and ensure the SADV division is fully staffed and supported in the work they do? How will you ensure staffing levels for all other relevant positions in the division are staffed up and trained?

When I became a State’s Attorney in 1991, the office had 2300 applications for just 50 positions. Today, the office faces significant understaffing. Historically, young attorneys were drawn to the State’s Attorney’s office not for monetary gain, but for the invaluable training and experience it offered. My aim is to establish a gold standard for training within prosecutor’s offices. To achieve this, I propose the creation of The Education Unit, overseen by retired judges, which will develop a comprehensive curriculum covering constitutional law, case precedents, and essential courtroom skills at every level of the office. This initiative will provide prosecutors with a trial work education akin to a Master’s degree, setting a national benchmark for prosecutor training.

How will you ensure that the assistant state’s attorneys assigned to prosecute gender-based violence cases have the knowledge, experience and skills to effectively screen, charge, and prosecute cases? How will you ensure this for other relevant positions including victim witness assistants and investigators?

To guarantee proficient handling of gender-based violence cases, my administration will institute tailored training programs for assistant state’s attorneys, victim witness assistants, and investigators. These initiatives will emphasize trauma-informed practices, legal intricacies, and victim-centered approaches. Continuous professional development will also be prioritized to stay current with evolving best practices. By providing our team with the requisite knowledge and skills, we will ensure a strong response to gender-based violence while providing support to survivors throughout the legal proceedings.
Recently, decisions to detain offenders in initial appearance court on domestic violence cases have been overturned on appeal due to insufficient evidence and reasoning provided by the State’s Attorney. How will you ensure that your office sufficiently documents the rationale for pretrial detention or less restrictive measures in case filings?

The Safety Act marks a significant shift in pre-trial detention procedures, prioritizing community safety over monetary considerations. Rather than setting bail amounts based on the severity of the offense, the focus now lies on assessing whether an individual poses a danger to the community. This reform ensures that wealth does not determine pretrial detention status. Prior to anyone being detained, the State’s Attorney is now required to file a petition to detain. Without that petition being filed, Judges have no discretion to detain. Because of this significant change in the power of the State’s Attorney’s office in pre-trial detention, it is exponentially more important that there are training, structure, and criteria in place for those ASAs assigned to bond court.

Due to my lifelong legal expertise, I possess a robust history of making fair and prudent decisions crucial for matters such as pretrial detention. I am committed to utilizing all available resources to ensure that dangerous and violent offenders remain detained, safeguarding the public.

For many years, Cook County was recognized as a national leader in the fight against human trafficking. Please outline your plans for the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking under your leadership?

There is a large pool of vulnerable people that predators will seize upon and I am very concerned that this pool has greatly increased in size due to the recent influx of migrants to the Chicagoland area. People with few means are at risk of being preyed upon. I want to be proactive in speaking to leaders and members of the migrant community to be on guard and to communicate to our office or to the police department anyone suspected of trafficking. Further, we have to engage volunteers in the community to build trust between law enforcement and new arrivals so that there isn’t fear in reporting wrongdoing. As State’s Attorney, I will assign a task force to this crucial issue.

Given the ongoing crisis of domestic violence involving firearm cases, the domestic violence community has been pushing legislation to address the removal of firearms in both civil and criminal orders of protection. Will your administration publicly commit to supporting Karina’s bill (SB2633/HB4469) which is expected to be taken up by the Illinois General Assembly? What steps will your office take to address domestic violence homicides generally, as well as those involving a firearm?

Yes, I fully support Karina’s Bill. As a prosecutor for 10 years, I saw firsthand the ravages of gun crime on communities and families. While I cannot influence legislative decisions, I will always fight for violent criminals, including domestic abusers to be held accountable for their actions, and kept off the streets to promote a greater sense of public safety.