

National Strategy Session on Sustaining Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Session 4

CHARITY HOPE: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining our national-strategy session today. My name is Charity Hope with the Center for Victimization and Safety at the Vera Institute of Justice and the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims.

We have just a few quick logistical items to go over before we begin. Participants are in listen-only mode-- you're already muted-- which means you should be able to hear us, but we will not be able to hear you.

If you would like to turn on your captioning, if you go to the bottom of your screen, your Zoom room, you'll see a little box that has a "CC" in it, and it says "Closed Caption," to the right of that box, there's an arrow. If you select that arrow, you can either view subtitles or view the full transcript. For either of those options, you'll be able to see the words that I'm speaking either popping up on the bottom of your screen or to the right of your screen.

If you cannot hear any of the presenters speaking, if you're having any difficulties with captioning, or interpreters, or any other technical difficulties during the presentation, please enter a message in the chat pod at the bottom of your screen. Please

direct any technology-related questions to Angelina Ortiz. This is the best way to communicate to our National Resource Center staff who are providing technical support today. We'll also be utilizing that Q&A pod that is also located at the bottom of your screen, and we'll use that once we open this up for some questions.

Just one quick note about your view in Zoom-- if you joined the session be a web browser, you will only be able to view the American Sign Language interpreter. If you join using the Zoom app, you'll be able to see both the panelists, as well as the ASL interpreter.

Just one other quick note-- we will also be recording today's national strategy session. A link to the recording will be made available on the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims's website. That web site is reachingvictims.org. Again, if you need to get a hold of us today for any tech support, chat Angelina Ortiz via the chat pod. And with that, I'll turn it over to Nancy.

NANCY SMITH: Great. Thank you, Charity. My name is Nancy Smith, and I'm with the Vera Institute of Justice. And I am also one of the co-conveners of the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims. And I am happy to be here with everyone today.

We are here in recognition of a few things. First, we recognize the extraordinary impact that COVID-19 is having on survivors of crime, their access to victim services, hospitals, police, courts, and many other vital systems of care. We also recognize the new and unprecedented set of challenges facing organizations that serve survivors. And at the same time, we recognize that we, as a field, are strong, and resilient, creative, and innovative. And we have created this time for us to come together to tap into our collective creativity and to solve these unprecedented challenges together.

We hope to do a few things during our session today. The first is really to create that space for us to come together. At this time, it can feel overwhelming, and we can feel alone, but we are not alone. There are people in communities across the country who are doing the exact same work and trying to figure out how to sustain services for survivors during this time. And we hope that this is an opportunity for us to bring everyone together.

And with that, I'd like to make an invitation. As this meeting is unfolding, if you'd like to jump into the Q&A box, you can go ahead and do so and let us know where you are logging on from. Again, the Q&A box, for those of you not familiar, is at the bottom of your screen. If you click on the icon called "Q&A," you can type in who you are and where you are calling in from.

In addition to providing a space and time for us to gather, we hope during this time that we share more information about what we know today, we surface some of the challenges and issues that we are facing, and we also provide guidance that we have available today. And at the start of this, we want to acknowledge that we will likely raise more questions than answers, and we are committed to finding those answers to any questions that remain unanswered after today's call.

As Charity mentioned, we are recording this session. You will be able to find a recording of this session, as well as a transcript and additional resources on the National Resource center's website once we have those available later in the week.

In terms of our call today, we are excited to be joined by a few of my amazing colleagues. And in a moment, I'll give them a chance to each introduce themselves. We are also joined today by representatives from the US Department of Justice's office for Victims of Crime and the Office on Violence Against Women. They are here in Listen mode, and they're here to learn from you about what's happening in communities, in programs. And they're also here to listen for your questions, and they are committed to taking those back to their offices and to have them shape the guidance that they are issuing on a daily basis to programs.

In the interest of time, we're going to go ahead and get started. I'm going to ask our panelists to introduce themselves, and then

we're going to go ahead and take some of the questions that you posed during your registration. We will also be taking questions that you're posing today. Again, you can provide us with those questions in two different ways. One is through the Q&A pod.

So again, at the bottom of your screen, there is an icon that says "Q&A." Click on that. You can open it up, you can pose a question for us.

You can also ask us your question directly. If you'd like your line unmuted, you can raise your hand, and someone on our team will unmute your line and, we'll call on you to ask your question. So again, while we're getting things started with introductions and taking some preliminary questions, please take the time to tell us who you are, where you're from, and to ask the questions that are on your mind.

With that, I am going to ask my panelists to introduce themselves. I'm wondering if you could get us started, Michael.

You bet. Thank you, Nancy, for holding this space again. And I'm really glad to be here with everybody.

MICHAEL FORGE: I'm Michael Munson. I'm with FORGE which is a transgender-antiviolence organization. We are one of the partners with the National Resource Center on Reaching Victims focusing on LGBTQ issues. We're glad to be part of that partnership, as

well as provide training and technical assistance to providers across the country.

We do a little bit of direct service with folks in Wisconsin, mostly trans folks who are victims of crime. That's the quick intro. Thank you.

CHARITY HOPE: Thanks, Michael. Sarah.

SARAH WEE: Hi. I'm Sarah Wee. I am with the Center for Survivor Agency Injustice. My colleague Erika is on the line, too, so I'll have her introduce herself and say more about who we are.

ERIKA SUSSMAN: Hi. My name's Erika Sussman. And I'm the founder and executive director of the Center for Survivor Agency and Justice.

We are a national organization that sits at the intersection between economic inequality and gender-based violence. And we house two Office on Violence Against Women funded technical-assistance projects, which include the Consumer Rights for Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors Initiative, as well as the Access to Justice for Survivors project.

We are very happy to be part of today's conversation. And we'll be sharing, hopefully, along the way, some insights that we gathered from the field this past Friday as we are learning how

advocates and survivors are experiencing COVID-19 in terms of economic barriers.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you, Erika. Erica Olsen, would you like to introduce yourself?

ERICA OLSEN: Hi. My name is Erica Olsen. I'm with the National Network to End Domestic Violence. I'm with the Safety Net Project. The Safety Net Project looks at all things technology as it impacts survivors of abuse.

About a year ago, we created a Digital Services Toolkit, and that particular piece of our work is coming up a lot right now, where a lot of programs are trying to do remote work and trying to communicate with survivors remotely. So we provide training and technical assistance. So we are here if people have ongoing questions beyond here. And we've been putting up some resources on our website, techsafety.org. So that's a main focus of the work that we're doing that we're bringing to this call.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you. Meg--

MEG GARVIN: Hi, everyone. Again, thanks to Vera for holding this meeting again. Meg Garvin with the National Crime Victim Law Institute. I logged in as NCVLI, so that's why it's up there.

The National Crime Victim Law Institute works on victims' rights, predominantly in criminal cases, but also, in collateral civil. So

we're a legal group that works directly with survivors, but also, predominantly provides technical assistance to lawyers across the country fighting for victims' rights.

So in this space, what we've been working on is a lot of work around trying to ensure that court orders are factoring victims' rights and that we're looking both at today and tomorrow around issues including things like statutes of limitations and extensions of protective orders. So happy to be on today.

NANCY SMITH: Thank, you Meg. I am going to start again with some questions that were submitted during your registration. If questions are coming to mind, please use the Q&A box to answer those, and we will return to those questions in a bit.

To get us started, I'm wondering if we can take the first set of questions and have Erika and Sarah talk a little bit. We are hearing across the country about the tremendous economic impact that COVID-19 is having on communities. We know that economic justice is a central issue for survivors prior to COVID-19. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're hearing in terms of some of those economic barriers and realities that survivors are facing and what you know programs are doing to creatively address them?

ERIKA SUSSMAN: Sure. So a critical part of CSAJ's work really rests on the basic premise that there is no safety for survivors

without access to economic security. And I think that what we are witnessing right now and hearing from survivors, and advocates, and programs across the country is that the current circumstance resulting from COVID is just an exacerbated illustration of that.

So you know as survivors find their spaces more limited, in terms of access to transportation and access, of course, to employment opportunity, the options for safety are greatly diminished. Of course, we can talk about that in terms of both educational opportunity, of course, as well as an employment opportunity and the rippling impacts that that has on families into the future. So families that find themselves in a predicament where they don't have access to, for example, school lunches, or they don't have access to the technology to be able to access-- staying up to date with education are finding themselves impacted.

Being able to just access, of course, services that many of the folks on this call are in the business of providing has become increasingly difficult because people don't have transportation. And, of course, the limited the limitations on being in the same space impacts that as well.

That's really looking at it through the lens of individual survivors, but, of course, what are the economic impacts on entire swaths of marginalized communities? And that shows up very clearly depending on which groups we're talking about. So for example, undocumented immigrant survivors are reluctant to access the

help that they need due to all sorts of very legitimate fears related to deportation. Low-wage workers who are deemed to be folks who are providing essential services, in many instances, whether that's in the food or health-care industry are finding themselves at greater risk of both-- greater health risk. And of course, what are the economic implications of that for themselves and their families?

And so these kinds of structural inequalities are showing up in very clear ways and are having a disproportionate economic impact on marginalized and multiply marginalized communities across the country. I don't know, Sarah, if you would like to add to that at all.

SARAH WEE: No. I think the things that I would add that we were hearing that folks are doing-- and we can share some resources on this-- are really, going back to survivor-centered-advocacy basics and making sure that these economic questions are happening in conversation with the realization that programs-- like, what can programs do? Where can programs be flexible and step in? And where can programs maybe leverage partnerships? Where can programs think about some of the newer, or as Erika was saying "exacerbated" barriers.

We have some tools on screening and assessment, and tips for integrating economics into a conversation that we can share. And I think that's helpful in thinking about how to prioritize, how to

think through some of the challenges, be it employment or managing income that is coming. And then some of the new challenges are both in going remote and even thinking about what to do with and when financial stimulus happens, and using partnerships in the community to limit risks in where checks and money might go, and how to use that. And so I think some of these questions and ways to set those goals and be the voice in community can be helpful. So I'll drop a few of those links into the chat while others chime in.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you so much, Erika and Sarah. And I know everyone would love to access those resources, so those links are greatly appreciated.

You mentioned going remote. And I know many programs are going remote in two ways. Many programs are having staff work at home for the first time, and many programs are launching tele-advocacy or mobile advocacy to stay connected with survivors, or they're expanding what they're already doing. So they've got a lot of questions about going remote in those two ways.

Eric's Olsen, I'm wondering if you can talk about some of the important considerations that programs should be making as they are launching tele-advocacy or virtual advocacy to stay connected with survivors.

ERICA OLSEN: Yeah, absolutely. So all of this is going to be looking at a lot of technology use. And first of all, it's really important for us to remember and think through that not all of the technology that we use to communicate with each other, with our families, or as colleagues is going to be safe and appropriate to use to communicate with survivors who are disclosing their personal information and sharing personally identifying information with us. So it's going to be a little bit more challenging for programs because we are going to have to think quickly through implementing multiple forms of technology to meet different needs, and that's why we are trying to provide so many resources and a lot of guidance to help people through those different situations.

First and foremost, it's really important to recognize whether we're rolling out the technology for remote work, or communicating with survivors, or both. We want to prioritize privacy and confidentiality, recognizing that even in situations of public-health crisis or emergency, our confidentiality obligations still remain and remain a core part of how we need to do this work. So we want to prioritize looking at the technology, the access that is given or allowed with any type of technology that we're using is going to be a really important first step.

And that access is twofold. The first is what type of access does the company have? Two, what information is being shared or

collected when we are using it? It might mean some agencies or some companies might actually be able to see full-content transcripts of chats and things like that. That is not something we would ever want to use for crisis communication with survivors.

Some other companies might not see that level of information, but they still would know IP addresses and identifying information of all users. We also want to think through access levels within our organization when we're using certain types of technology, just as we use discretion and make rules, applying of who gets to see what information to minimize privacy risks to survivors within our agencies, that's going to apply to technology use as well. So thinking through what kind of access levels we would want, not everyone in the organization would have the same password to access our databases, for example.

So a lot of it right up front is going to be, what company is going to give us the kind of security, the privacy, and the granular options that we're going to need to be able to be in control of the data and in control of the technology in a way that helps us prioritize those things.

So that's one of the primary first points. There's a lot more to that too. There's a lot of ways that we want to be thinking creatively on how to get a digital consent to make sure that we're talking with survivors about their needs and their privacy and their safety. We're seeing a real influx of questions specifically

around video, which can be such a great tool to allow us to have some face to face with survivors at this time, but it also is a tool that maybe some survivors might not want to use if they don't feel like talking out loud in their home is going to be a safe thing for them.

So we want to have individual conversations and allow for an individual services as much as possible. Similarly, we don't want for survivors to have to download something on a device if they don't feel like that's going to be a safe thing. So that might be another feature question about the technology that we're using. So those are some examples of the things that we're helping people navigate.

NANCY SMITH: Thanks, Erica. Lots of things to follow up there. One of them-- you mentioned video. I'm wondering-- anyone on the panel could respond to this-- a common question that we're seeing is, how can we stay connected with survivors with physical distancing as a norm that we're all agreeing to, and also, with some stay-at-home orders popping up in communities across the country? Anyone like to take that? Michael, do you have anything to share on that?

MICHAEL FORGE: Sure. I think that one of the things that most advocates do is respond in kind to like how we're receiving requests. And I know Olga mentioned this on one of the other

calls about how she tends to respond to people how they interact with her. So we're finding that we are doing the same thing.

So people are texting us. We're texting them back. If they're saying, I'd like to have a video call, we initiate a video call. And we're doing things that may not meet some of the safety requirements or the confidentiality requirements, but that's an informed-consent kind of reaction that we're having with folks.

We're saying, hey, this may not be the most secure environment for us to talk-- like, by Zoom, for example-- But is that something that's accessible to you, or should we find a different way? So we're having those direct dialogues-- and I know that other agencies are as well-- and giving that choice back to the survivor about what feels right for them and what feels safe for them.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you. Michael, you mentioned Zoom. Erica, I know this is a common question that's on everyone's mind. Are there any services that you would recommend that are VAWA compliant?

ERICA OLSEN: Yeah, so I'm happy to jump in on this. So there's no service that is marketing themselves anyway as VAWA compliant. Most of the companies will try to market themselves as HIPAA compliant, and so you may see that.

So first, I just want to point out that that's always a good option because it means that the company is being considerate to privacy, because some are not at all thinking about privacy. So we want people and companies who are at least considering it. But HIPAA compliance doesn't necessarily mean VAWA compliance because VAWA, VOCA, and HIPAA are a greater standard for privacy and confidentiality.

So if something is HIPAA compliant, it still could be out of compliance with VAWA. But if you find something that meets the requirements of VAWA, then it will also be HIPAA compliant. If you have an agency where you have multiple staff who are trying to juggle different obligations, that's an important piece to remember.

So Zoom is an interesting platform because it's a much much more accessible platform, especially for deaf survivors. So we've been having this conversation a lot internally about how frustrating it can be, that survivors shouldn't have to be in a place where they have to choose between ease of use, and accessibility, and privacy. But unfortunately, a lot of the platforms that are out there are not considering privacy or accessibility in the same way.

So Zoom is a little bit better for accessibility in many ways in some of the functionality that offers. But it's not, by default, going to be the most private option. They do have what they call

a "HIPAA-compliant add-on" that you can ask for and for them to turn that setting on. And basically, what that means is when users are using it and they're signing in, that no identifying information about the users will be collected on Zoom's end.

Unfortunately, from what we know right now-- although this is an advocacy point that we're taking with Zoom-- is unfortunately, they do charge for that. So when we are paying for Zoom already, we will also have to pay more to guarantee that kind of privacy.

The other options that we are sharing with people are one called Gruveo-- G-R-U-E-V-E-O-- I have to spell it in my head. Gruveo and Cyph-- C-Y-P-H. And we'll put those in the chat so you have those links. So both of those are online video options, and Cyph also offers online chat as well.

So those are ones that are extremely privacy focused. They don't collect any information. They are encrypted communications. They also don't require any download onto the user's device. So they're very simple and straightforward for somebody to be able to meet you online for a quick video chat or a connect.

So those are great for that, but they're not excellent at accessibility, which is again, another advocacy point for these. And we're pushing for them to be better as quickly as possible. And then also, if you're not looking for video, and you are looking

for online chat or a secure texting option-- which again, might be a really good thing for us to be looking into at this time. Because again, not only would video not be great for all survivors, but in the time when bandwidth might be an issue, survivors who rely heavily on public Wi-Fi and can't get to public Wi-Fi right now, text or chat might be a better option for them.

And for that, we would suggest looking at Resource Connect, which is still offering their online chat and text platform for free right now to all programs.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you so much. I want to pause just for a second for the interpreters to change. All right, wonderful. Thank you. OK, I want to take a question that's come up since we've been on the call. This question is coming from Paul. "Has there been any consideration of hazard duty pay for staff working in this risky environment?"

Has anyone been involved in any conversations where that has been raised? Michael?

MICHAEL MUNSON: This is Michael. I don't have a direct answer to that question, but one of the things that's tangential to that question is that locally, we've been working with a survivor. And one of our employees has had to work with this person. And this person has tested positive for COVID. So we're thinking about

how can we protect our employee, and how can we protect the survivor.

Getting this person housing has been next to impossible-- other than hotel housing. So we're thinking a lot about what that means in terms of hazardous duty and how can we protect our employees. I don't have an answer to the question though. It's a tough question, I think.

NANCY SMITH: Paul, thanks for raising this. As we mentioned earlier, we anticipated that we would have a lot of questions that we may not have answers to, and I think that this is one of them. And I'm excited that we have staff from the Office on Violence Against Women and the Office for Victims of Crime here who can also hear this question. And we make a commitment to circle back to this question. As we post guidance on our website we will be looking for answers to this question as well.

For the rest of you on the call, if you have heard of any practices around hazardous duty pay for staff who are supporting survivors, please use the Q&A chat pod, and you can share what you're seeing in your community as well.

Another question-- actually, I just saw something pop up in the Q&A box, where someone has written in and said that their agency is offering hazard pay to shelter workers. So it's wonderful, I think, during this time for programs who are able to

do so to be able to provide that additional support to people who are really working on the front lines of this.

Michael, what you just shared touches on this a little bit, but I'm wondering if anyone could speak to some protocols or what people are thinking in terms of reporting positive tests to health departments. That would be of survivors that we are currently serving. Erica, do you-- yeah, go ahead.

ERICA OLSEN: Yeah, we are actually going to be doing a recorded piece-- not a webinar, but just a recorded session-- that people could go on and listen to and share with others that specifically addressing a lot of these confidentiality questions because we're seeing a lot of these right now. It's going to be really important for everyone at the agencies to understand that even again, in the case of a public health crisis, our confidentiality obligations are going to remain the same, which is basically that we can't share personally-identifying information without a written, informed, and time-limited consent from the person. Or without a mandate that is either a statutory mandate or a court order. And that is an official court order signed by a judge.

So without a state passing a specific, mandatory-reporting statute that's going to specifically identify shelter workers, advocates, and crisis workers in that statute, there is not a current exemption that would say that we could report them. So we want to do the same thing that we would do in any other

situation where there might be some things happening. Maybe there would be an arrest warrant, or a missing persons report, or something like that. We want to talk with the survivor about all the potential options and encourage the person to report themselves. If there's somebody who's was identified to be at the shelter or a program around other survivors, then the program can be in control.

Similar to how schools handle those kind of things. If there's a infectious disease case at a public school, they don't notify all of the parents or anyone else about who was involved or give any personally-identifying information. It's really, though, about sharing information about this is happening, these are the precautions that we're going to take, this is what we have to do in regards to this, and this is what we're going to continue to do.

So it's about sharing and trying to be transparent about all the actions that are being taken at the program level to address that issue one-on-one, but we wouldn't be able to report without there being a state-specific statute in place allowing for that. So it's really helping survivors to know who to call and where to call. And in most places, the health care professionals who are doing the task-- if there is an active and positive test because a test was given and done-- then the health care officials know that test, and they will be the ones for releasing personally-identifying information to the Department of Health and to anyone else

involved. We wouldn't have to step in and take action that would be beyond our role.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you, Erica. Another question that came in through the chat box is about accessing American Sign Language interpreters, which I think is critical in terms of maintaining services for deaf survivors. And especially as we use more and more video-based strategies for our advocacy, having relationships with qualified sign language interpreters in your community is critical. Just a couple suggestions there. At the Vera Institute of Justice, we do quite a bit of work to support deaf survivors and also to support a pool of qualified, trauma-informed sign language interpreters.

First and foremost, if you haven't done so, I would suggest reaching out and developing a partnership and a connection to an agency in your state that is run by deaf people for deaf people to support survivors. And if you need a list of those programs, there are 20 or so programs around the country. We can certainly connect you with those programs. You're also welcome to reach out directly to us at the Vera Institute of Justice, and we can help connect you to organizations in your community that are run by deaf people, and they can provide a list of interpreters that they trust. And we also can connect you to interpreters across the country.

So thank you so much for that question. I have a couple other questions. Meg, we haven't even begin to talk about the impact COVID-19 is having on the court system. I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about what you're seeing, the impact being, and any strategies you've seen for how programs are continuing to support survivors as they navigate the court system.

MEG GARVIN: Sure, so again, court system, we'd want to split it between civil and criminal. On the civil side, there have started to be a few states moving forward with suspending statutes of limitations so that no one has to do a rush to court to file a civil moment. Which is, in the long term, pretty important thinking for some of our survivors, particularly since we just got statutes of limitations extended-- particularly for sexual violence. So if states have not done that yet, it's something to consider. We're happy to help with drafting some advocacy around that.

When it comes to general civil practice, right now, most civil proceedings have been suspended. And so that's something to keep in mind, which is why the statute of limitations extension matters or suspension matters. Civil protective orders, most jurisdictions are proceeding. Most jurisdictions are moving towards allowing the telephonic or remote appearance if at all possible, both for the initial hearing and for any contested moment.

Some courts, particularly in rural communities, are still not allowing that. So we're trying to get some advocacy around at least telephonic appearance. If you're still running into that, please reach out. We are still running into the challenges with certain jurisdictions requiring notary signing on document submissions, so we're trying to get self-affidavits in place in every jurisdiction. If you've succeeded at that, would you reach out, and if you're still struggling with it, would you reach out also to NCVLI?

On the criminal side, most criminal proceedings are being held in abeyance. They're basically being continued unless it is a critical moment of a case. So grand juries and jury trials are all being postponed. Most courts have now become explicit that those continuances are not going to run against the speedy trial clock, so that survivors will still have access to criminal justice prosecution after this is over.

When it comes to some crisis moments right now that we're seeing-- our critical moments-- is that releases are happening from jails still across the country, without notice to survivors. So we are working on, and we'll be posting on our page, some standard letters to argue to courts-- and to prosecutors, to be honest-- that victims' rights are not suspended during this time, and that the problem with release without notice to the victim is, of course, the human problem of safety. It is also a legal problem

because in many jurisdictions, failure to notify the victim is against the law-- either constitutional or statutory-- and the victim has to complain about it within a certain statutory period of time and demand a hearing. Which means by failing to notify the victim of the release, we are actually causing more court proceedings, which is exactly the opposite of what courts are trying to do right now. So release is a very critical moment and we're trying to get notice processes in place at the front end.

Those are some of the biggest ones. On NCVLI's website, we're trying to collect-- both ourselves and then just point to other people who have already collected-- court orders, civil and criminal, affecting status. So on our COVID update page, there are links to spreadsheets that have court orders impacting proceedings across the country. On our page it is crowdsourced, so if you're aware of another court order, you could upload it yourself, the link to it, as a way to try and ensure that we're all seeing best practice.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you, Meg. Erika, I'm wondering if there's anything on your end you'd like to add about the economics piece and the courts.

ERIKA SUSSMAN: Yeah, absolutely. So I think that's sort of a common theme that we're always struggling with-- even during less challenging times-- with courts is trying to articulate what safety requires and what qualifies as an emergency. And so right

now, as Meg had referenced, most of the court proceedings that are moving forward are those which are deemed to be an emergency. And I think that that translates into, for the most part, protection order proceedings. What that doesn't encompass typically-- and of course, there's lots of variation from jurisdiction to jurisdiction-- is custody proceedings, child support proceedings, and all sorts of consumer law and other economic, sole legal contexts.

So what are the implications for that, for example, when child support is a critical factor in terms of somebody being able to have just basic resources, to be able to pay rent, pay for groceries, and all sorts of other basic necessities? The implications are huge and, of course, if that is not available, then people's safety is on the line. So I would imagine that this idea of what is deemed an emergency in the court context is going to be one that, I think, is actually ripe for advocacy.

If we know, for example, that the link between poverty and physical safety is a very clear one, then we as advocates, doing the creative work that we all do and have done historically, are in the position to advocate within administrative agencies, court agencies, and policymaking bodies that for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, access to economic resources is critical to their safety. And it is an emergency, just as a "stay-away" order would be. I also just want to lift up the fact that many of the

sweeping, local community-organizing and policy changes that we are seeing emerge in different places are due to that kind of creative advocacy on the part of advocates across the country.

So several jurisdictions have put a moratorium on eviction proceedings. Some in the area of mortgages as well. And then what is the role of advocates, in terms of organizing with the private sector, where there are folks within corporations that are making lots of money that are very inclined to provide some of their funds to be able to support folks within their corporations who are very clearly being hit in a life-saving type of manner? And so those kinds of organizing efforts are being done by advocates and sometimes with the encouragement and creativity in all sorts of sectors, whether it's government or private.

NANCY SMITH: Thanks, Erika. I'd like to actually open up the line. We have a few participants who have been patiently raising their virtual hands, and I'd like to ask one of my colleagues if they could unmute the line, I believe, of Michelle. Michelle has had their hand up, patiently waiting.

AUDIENCE: Yes, I was just wondering what your thoughts were on shelters, in general, of us. We're seeing call volumes go up during the crisis. However, we have limited bed space. It's hard to put victims in hotels because there's limited food and cleaning supplies for them. So what are other people doing that's having this problem?

NANCY SMITH: Thank you, Michelle. That's a great question and, I think, one that many programs around the country are confronting now. Would any of our panelists like to share what they're hearing? Michael?

MICHAEL MUNSON: Yeah, this is Michael. I'm not going to directly address your question because I don't know exactly what folks are doing across the country, other than we too are hearing that there's a volume increase at shelters. There's an increase of intimate partner violence and domestic violence happening because people are staying at home with potentially abusive partners or family members.

From an LGBT organization, it's really interesting for us to be watching how LGBT people are already very difficult to place in shelters because of some gender-based parameters of those shelters. So when we're looking at folks, we're seeing a lot more people having difficulty placing folks in already-crowded shelters that may or may not accept gay or bi men or transgender people of any gender vector, and just what folks are doing. And I know that a lot of folks are partnering with churches and with other organizations to either try to crowdfund to raise money for hotels if they don't have enough money or do mutual aid to try to get folks food who are staying in hotels that they're getting necessarily because they're not in that communal space.

We're also hearing that a lot of shelters are shutting their doors to new clients because of COVID. So they don't want to have additional people coming into their spaces. So I know with one city that we've worked with, literally none of the shelters are accepting any new residents. So I mean, obviously domestic violence is not stopping but there are no shelters in that area within a 90-mile radius that we can find for placement more than the agencies that are around there can find.

So that's a really difficult challenge and I don't know that any of us really have solid answers because we're all flying by the seat of our pants right now. And it's an interesting time, but I would be interested in what other folks are doing as well, other than trying to collaborate with folks that may have additional money, and work with people like the United Way, who's offered some direct support for individuals. There's some creative ways like that, but it doesn't solve the real problem of shelters being overtaxed or not allowing folks in.

SARAH WEE: This is Sarah. I'll just chime in. Some programs do things like flexible funding as well, and what resonates with me is thinking what is the housing need and the instability.

We were just talking with a program that if you have the flexibility to maybe increase the subsidy that you give to a survivor now, if that will allow them to stay where they are, if that's what they want, then do that. Going to funders to see if

you can reallocate, redirect the use of certain funds. If you have funding for resources but maybe not housing, it's a good time to advocate with funders about what the needs and the economic barriers are right now.

And then I heard some creative things that are coming up that really just echoes what Erika said earlier-- going to tenants' rights unions in your cities, towns, states. Some folks were even talking about development being slowed, and there are a lot of empty apartments in larger cities that aren't being occupied that might be more of a medium longer term. But that could be a partnership-building strategy as you think about the "right now." So those are a few things that come to mind.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you--

ERIKA SUSSMAN: I also-- sorry.

SPEAKER: Go ahead, Erika.

ERIKA SUSSMAN: I was just gonna say real quick that I have also witnessed many executive directors of local programs really reaching out, in very descriptive ways, to their communities about the hardships that domestic violence survivors are facing right now. So really trying to illustrate what people's lives look like, whether that's talking about the desperation of a hotline call or what somebody's lived experience is in these circumstances,

and using that as an opportunity to reach out to individual donors who may be inclined to be generous with their funding right now.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you both so much. We only have about six minutes left, and I wanna thank all of the panelists for answering these questions. And I'd like to open it up to each of you to share something that you hope we each take with us and carry forward into our work. So I'm wondering who would like to get us started with that? Michael?

MICHAEL MUNSON: I'm willing to, since nobody else jumped in. One of the things that I've been thinking a lot about lately, and I think it's really important for all of us to remember, is about how critical it is to be present with folks. We're working in this environment, and we're living in this environment of uncertainty, and there's a lot of information coming at us.

And I think for survivors, there's a chaotic realm anyway. And so when somebody can be really present with them, not looking at our phones, not looking at five things at once, but really giving that time and space-- maybe allowing double the time or space that we would normally allocate for working with somebody. And that includes both survivors and the providers that we might be working with. But just really allowing us to be present, and maybe checking in more often with our co-workers, as well as with the survivors that we work with. I think that's been one of

the biggest things that has come up for us and the people that we've been working with over the last couple of weeks.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you, Michael. Erica Olson? ERICA OLSEN: Yeah, again, I want to echo a little bit of what Michael was saying that we want to try to be as present as possible, and technology can absolutely give us opportunities for connection that are so needed and important at this time. But we also don't want to over use the technology and miss the other ways that we can be connecting with people. And sometimes, it's not just about video, it might be calling somebody up or sending a note, if you're comfortable with mail.

I know. I was sending something in the mail to my uncle, and I said, maybe just leave it in your mailbox for three days. I don't know how to handle this. But we want to figure out all the ways that we can be connecting with people and still feeling safe.

And just real quick, I want to reiterate that we are here to answer your questions. Technology can open up a lot of opportunities, but it can also be really overwhelming. So contact us if you need any assistance at all. We're definitely trying to answer questions for everybody.

NANCY SMITH: Thank you. Erika Sussman?

ERIKA SUSSMAN: Yeah, something to take with us. I think that the greatest challenge from this experience right now is also our greatest opportunity in many ways, which is that this experience is really shedding a light on many of the systemic inequities and the broken places within all of the systems that survivors navigate on a daily basis. So whether we're talking about public benefits, or transportation, or educational access, or issues related to credit and debt, or educational and employment opportunity, all of these systems have, for a long time, had barriers that are in need of our public attention. And I'm hopeful that by being in a space right now where folks with perhaps more privilege are able to see those barriers, that we'll be able to leverage some of that privilege toward systems and policy change to better meet the economic needs of survivors.

NANCY SMITH: Sarah?

SARAH WEE: I would echo what everyone has already said. And to everyone on the call, just that this is what advocate survivors' communities do. We're good at this, good at strategizing, and good at reinventing community, even when they're physically pulling us apart. And so I'm excited by that problem in the face of this.

So thank you everybody on the call for sharing that, and for doing that, and showing up. And for CSAJ, we are-- just so you know-- taking these conversations seriously and bringing it to

some of our partners, in DV as well as non-DV spaces, and antipoverty, anti-racist work, asking questions about future adjustments that we'll all be making. So we hope to continue doing that strategizing, share it back with you, do it back with all of you. And so that's something we are committing to, and we are here in the meantime, as well.

NANCY SMITH: Thanks. Meg?

MEG GARVIN: Sure-- very briefly-- each of us is seeing a piece of the puzzle, so the more we can keep doing this, I think, the better. As well as finding those online spaces to share resources. So the more folks can, in one place, have as much information as possible, so we all don't have to navigate too far, the better. And then there's a chance that we'll see more of the picture. So I'm really appreciative of these calls. I'm appreciative of everything in the chat box.

I have been-- even now I know I'll have it available later-- taking notes, and marking it down. So the more we can do that, I think, the more during the crisis we will be effective. But honestly, after this, we will actually know each other's expertise inside and out, and our survivors will be better served.

NANCY SMITH: Well, thank you all so much. I want to just close this meeting with an incredible amount of gratitude. Thank you, everyone, for joining this call today. We really appreciate

everyone being here, and being together during this time, and sharing what is happening around the country.

I also want to thank our panelists. We really appreciate all of the wisdom and all of the information that you have shared, and also your willingness to be there for everyone. And we know your open invitation of support to all of us means an incredible amount right now.

And I'd also-- lastly-- like to thank the Vera staff, who were working behind the scenes to make this meeting happen and to have been providing support during the meeting to make sure we get your questions, and we get those questions answered. So thank you all so much, and we will see you at our next session. Bye.