

# EDUCATION, PREVENTION AND SUPPORT: A PLAN TO ERADICATE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## POLICY BRIEF

There should be no room in our society for domestic violence. Yet despite the progress San Francisco has made toward addressing the problem, too many individuals and families in our community are victims of domestic violence, and there is not enough coordination among the law enforcement, criminal justice and social service systems that serve them. As a Supervisor, I have pursued efforts to improve and expand domestic violence services. If elected Mayor, I will do everything in my power to ensure citizens are educated about domestic violence prevention, victims and their families can rely on comprehensive and coordinated support services, and perpetrators are prevented from repeating their abuse.

### THE SCOURGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Domestic violence is a serious problem in San Francisco. The statistics are sobering. Last year (2002), there were 1,719 domestic violence cases reported to law enforcement – up 12% from 2001. This figure represents only the number of reported cases; hundreds of additional cases go unreported every year. In 1999, nearly one-quarter of all San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) violent arrests were for domestic violence-related incidents. In 1998, nearly half the women murdered in our city were killed by their partners.

Over the past two decades, our city has made great strides in recognizing and addressing the causes and effects of domestic violence. I have been a strong supporter of steps taken by the City and County of San Francisco, such as the establishment of dedicated domestic violence units within the Police Department, District Attorney’s Office, Courts and elsewhere; a centralized crisis hotline; and better data sharing among criminal justice agencies.

Yet for all our progress, too many people are still being hurt or killed by their intimate partners. Too many children are bearing witness to this terrible abuse: an estimated 1,422 children in San Francisco under the age of six have witnessed domestic violence. And too few abusers are being convicted and prevented from repeating their crimes: San Francisco’s conviction rate for domestic violence crimes was just 27% in 1998, the lowest in the state.

Domestic violence affects all racial and ethnic groups, claims victims of all ages and genders, and has consequences that can extend for generations. San Francisco-based Community

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United Against Violence answers hundreds of hotline calls every year regarding same-sex domestic violence matters. According to Adult Protective Services, 800 cases a month of abuse of citizens over 65 and of disabled adults 18-64 are reported in San Francisco; 75% of cases that are investigated are substantiated. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that only one in five cases of adult abuse are reported.

There are several steps I intend to take as Mayor to ensure that we make better and faster progress at reducing this insidious problem:

- Expedite implementation of the JUSTIS Project, a coordinated system by which City departments will be able to share crime-fighting information, including data on domestic violence arrests and convictions.
- Move to digital recording of calls made to the city's 911 Emergency Communications Center, thereby preserving these calls as evidence.
- Seek to expand and leverage resources to make adequate services and supports available for all victims, witnesses and survivors of domestic violence, including the possible creation of a "one-stop shop" of comprehensive services for domestic abuse victims.
- Work closely with the Chief of Police and the District Attorney to ensure that their agencies make pursuit and prosecution of domestic violence crimes a top priority, and that they improve inter-agency communication and coordination.
- Work with the Commission on the Status of Women to continue to implement recommendations from its 2002 report, *Justice and Courage: A Blueprint for San Francisco's Response to Domestic Violence*, including the development of a citywide domestic violence prevention initiative.

*“According to Adult Protective Services, 800 cases a month of abuse towards seniors over the age of 65 and disabled adults 18-64 are reported in San Francisco...”*

## **PROGRESS, BUT NOT ENOUGH...**

San Francisco has a myriad of excellent nonprofit organizations, many of them leaders in the field, that offer services to victims of domestic violence. Their services range from emergency shelter, medical help and legal assistance, to family counseling, long-term housing, employment support, prevention services and policy advocacy. We have provider networks like the Domestic Violence Consortium, which works to coordinate services and keep victims from falling through the cracks. We have resources like the Family Violence Council and the Family Violence Prevention Fund, whose wide-ranging efforts include creating protocols for professionals who handle domestic violence cases. We have emergency shelter and crisis hotlines tailored to serve the needs of San Francisco's diverse citizenry. San Francisco also has a leading program at UCSF to help children cope with post-traumatic stress and other consequences of witnessing domestic violence.

With its wide network of providers and experts, San Francisco should be a role model for other communities in domestic violence prevention, prosecution and assistance. Sadly, this is not yet the case. We know, for example, that approximately

25% of domestic violence cases are never reported — in many cases because the victim is not sure where to turn first or because the process of obtaining help is overwhelming. Victims who do enter the system often get worn down, physically and emotionally, by the process of dealing with multiple agencies and telling their story again and again. Bureaucratic hurdles were at least part of the reason Claire Joyce Tempongko was killed by her ex-boyfriend in October 2000, despite her having contacted police at least six times in the previous 18 months about threats and violence he committed against her.

In response to the murder of Claire Joyce Tempongko, I made sure the City undertook a comprehensive evaluation of how our criminal justice and social service systems respond to domestic violence. I authored legislation that provided funding for an investigation by the Commission on the Status of Women and the City Attorney's Office, resulting in the report *Justice and Courage: A Blueprint for San Francisco's Response to Domestic Violence*. While acknowledging the tremendous progress made since a similar report prepared 10 years earlier, the Justice and Courage report contained 100 recommendations for improvements covering major City departments, criminal justice authorities, courts and community-based services. These recommendations make it clear we still have much to do, particularly in the areas of inter-departmental communication, coordination and training, to improve and expand services.

## THE JUSTIS PROJECT

With the progress we have made in raising the visibility of the problem of domestic violence, many victims are coming forward and there are legal remedies in place to prosecute abusers. So why do so many cases go uninvestigated until, as was the case with Claire Joyce Tempongko, it is too late? The problem is due to some extent to the inability of local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to share information on a real-time basis. These data tracking problems negatively impact individual criminal justice cases as well as the ability to analyze patterns and trends in domestic violence overall.

The Justice and Courage report called for the creation of a seamless computer system to ensure a coordinated database for all departments and agencies within the criminal justice system. In 2001, I authorized legislation creating the Justice Tracking Information System, or JUSTIS. The system uses state-of-the-art technology to help police, prosecutors, probation officials and courts track criminal activity. This system will be particularly valuable for eliminating the kinds of information failures that have allowed domestic violence incidents to escalate without adequate intervention. It will provide instant notification to the appropriate departments when a probationer or parolee is involved in a domestic violence incident or any other reported crime. When JUSTIS is implemented, San Francisco will be the first city in the nation to have a coordinated database among all agencies working to combat domestic violence.

As Mayor, I will take the steps necessary to ensure the JUSTIS Project is put on a fast-track to completion.

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## **DIGITAL 911**

One reason domestic violence cases are sometimes not adequately prosecuted is the limited evidence available to the courts. Many times it is a matter of the victim's word against that of the alleged abuser. Calls to 911 can be used in court as corroborating evidence; unfortunately, the audio recordings of these files are often unavailable quickly enough to make a difference. For this reason, I have called on the city's Emergency Communications Department and other relevant departments to investigate digitizing 911 audio recordings so they can be made immediately available at arraignment in order to bolster bail application screening, increase the likelihood that domestic violence defendants will be incarcerated pending trial, and afford prosecutors greater leverage in negotiating pleas.

## **ENSURE ADEQUATE SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOR ALL VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

As Supervisor, I supported several measures to expand and centralize domestic violence services, including the establishment of San Francisco's first centralized 24-hour multi-language domestic violence crisis line, the development of "special needs housing" for girls and young women that partners low-cost housing with social services, and programs to investigate elder abuse. Even so, I recognize that many victims of domestic violence are still not able to access all the services they need, when they need them. Other cities, notably San Diego, have had great success in reducing domestic violence by centralizing services into a "one-stop shop" where victims of domestic violence can report a crime, receive medical attention, talk to an advocate, get a restraining order, meet a prosecutor, and obtain a continuum of support services — all in one place.

We know that San Francisco needs to do more to coordinate services and reduce the access barriers for people who are experiencing violence and trauma. In San Diego, there has been a 75% drop in domestic violence-related homicides over the past 15 years, thanks largely to a strategy of coordinating community response and convening experts in a coordinating council. In 2002, San Diego opened the nation's first one-stop shop, the San Diego Family Justice Center.

As Mayor, I will work with city agencies and community-based providers to determine whether San Francisco could benefit from implementing the one-stop shop model. I will also use the capacity of the Resource Development Office that I intend to form to seek state, federal and private funds to ensure San Francisco stays on the cutting edge of the fight against domestic violence.

## **MAKE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE A TOP LAW ENFORCEMENT PRIORITY**

I have sponsored and supported an array of legislation that would provide tougher prosecution of spousal abusers and better support for victims, and I have always supported strong arrest and prosecution policies in response to rape and domestic violence. But policies are only as good as the people and systems that implement them. We need leaders, especially in the Police Department and the District Attorney's office, who take domestic violence as seriously as other types of crimes.

As Mayor, I will work closely with the Chief of Police and the District Attorney to set priorities for pursuing domestic violence cases, to identify specific improvements for domestic violence prevention, and to improve communication and coordination between their departments. I expect these priorities to include the development of internal communication and investigation protocols, expanded access to victims' advocates, and improved training, especially regarding cultural diversity and victim sensitivity. Equally important, I will hold these key leaders accountable for implementing these priorities and improvements through annual progress reviews where appropriate.

## **ESTABLISH A CITY-WIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVE**

As Mayor, I want to be sure that we are able to continually monitor and improve our efforts to prevent the tragedy of domestic violence. I will work closely with the Commission on the Status of Women to implement the recommendations of the Justice and Courage report, especially its recommendation to initiate public education efforts around domestic violence prevention. Early in my administration, I will hold a summit on domestic violence to bring together all of the City's stakeholders. Out of this summit, a plan will be created outlining a citywide public awareness and education initiative. The plan will focus on educating youth – in schools, via City departments and agencies such as the Department of Human Services and Youth Guidance Center, and community-based settings such as the YMCA – to eradicate domestic violence in the next generation, as well as on educating parents and guardians to prevent them from passing on the example of violence to their children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Domestic violence will not disappear from our society overnight. But if we are to reduce domestic violence in San Francisco, we need to raise awareness and understanding of the problem. We need to educate people about how to prevent it. We need to make domestic violence a law enforcement priority, and coordinate our law enforcement, criminal justice and social service systems to support victims and their families. If elected Mayor, I will consider it my duty to bring City resources to bear on making domestic violence prevention, intervention and prosecution more effective for San Franciscans.

**SOURCES** Commission and Department on the Status of Women, Justice and Courage: A Blueprint for San Francisco's Response to Domestic Violence. March 2002. [http://www.sfgov.org/site/cosw\\_page.asp?id=10810](http://www.sfgov.org/site/cosw_page.asp?id=10810)