

# COOK COUNTY COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S ISSUES 2022 REPORT: CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



## Cook County Commission on Women's Issues

### Public Report

From the December 2nd,  
2021 Public Hearing

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## Cook County Commission on Women's Issues

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**COOK COUNTY COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S ISSUES**  
2022 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continued Support of Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

Cook County Commission on Women's Issues:

The Cook County Commission on Women's Issues was created by resolution of the Cook County Board of Commissioners in October of 1995. The Commission is composed of twenty-one women of various racial, economic, ethnic, and occupational backgrounds, including representatives of each of the seventeen Districts across Cook County, appointed by each District's County Commissioner, and four at-large commissioners, who are appointed by the President of the Cook County Board.

The Commission works to elevate the status of women and girls of Cook County, improve the delivery of services to women and their families, and eliminate inequalities in laws, practices, and conditions that impact Cook County women and girls. The Commission advises the President and members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners on issues of concern to women and girls. It develops policy and program recommendations and collaborates with a wide range of governmental and private sector organizations on projects addressing various issues affecting the status of women and girls, including domestic violence, childcare, economic equity, and health.

One of the powers and duties that the Resolution imbued to the Commission on Women's Issues was the authority to convene a public hearing to gather information on issues affecting women and girls. Every year the Commission on Women's Issues sponsors a public hearing on a topic of their choice relevant to issues facing women and girls. The Women's Commissioners select a topic and invite professionals, advocates, and other experts to present testimony and to identify recommendations for action to be taken by the Women's Commission, members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, and other interested stakeholders.

Public Hearing:

On December 2nd, 2021, the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues held a public hearing entitled: Listen, Believe, Support: Exploring Mental Health Needs of Survivors of Gender-Based Violence.

The public hearing's panelists:

Facilitator: Audra Wilson – Chairperson Cook County Commission on Women and Girls  
Executive Director of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Sandy T. Williams – Executive Director of Between Friends

Between Friends provides a safe and supportive environment for individuals and families in crisis. Our counselors empower clients to make their own decisions and choices, rather than making choices for them. Between Friends helps adult, teen, and child survivors of domestic violence to recognize that their experience is shared. We realize, and encourage others to realize, that the problem of domestic violence is social and political.

Erin Walton – Executive Director Resilience

Resilience is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the healing and empowerment of sexual assault survivors through non-judgmental crisis intervention counseling, individual and group trauma therapy, and medical and legal advocacy in the greater Chicago metropolitan area. Resilience provides public education and institutional advocacy to improve the treatment of sexual assault survivors and to effect positive change in policies and public attitudes toward sexual assault.

Angela Sedeño Ph.D - Executive Director Kedzie Center

The mission of the Kedzie Center is to provide accessible, culturally informed, quality mental health care to North River residents through the integration of clinical practice, education and evaluation, and the application of psychological insight to address community concerns, as informed by the community and in collaboration with residents and partners.

Dr. Wanda Parker – Aunt Martha's Health & Wellness

Aunt Martha's is a health and wellness not-for-profit organization serving over 105,000 children and adults throughout over 600 communities in Illinois. Aunt Martha's is a Primary Care Medical Home for more than 73,000 patients, and a vital resource for more than 125,000 children and adults from over 600 communities in Illinois.

## Development of Recommendations:

Following the public hearing, the Commission members met throughout the year to discuss the development of recommendations for the Cook County Board of Commissioners and collaborated with organizations such as Access Living, The Justice Advisory Council, and Apna Ghar.

## Recommendations

Gender-based violence is a plague that transcends race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It permeates every corner of Cook County: homes, streets, workplaces, and even designated "safe" places like schools and medical facilities. Female survivors of gender-based violence experience exceptionally high rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation. Providing for those impacted by gender-based violence with comprehensive and gender-sensitive, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed care mental health services will allow them to regain control of their bodies, sexuality, and lives.

The hearing brought forth many recommendations to support and respond to the increase of gender-based violence locally by uplifting the importance of such wrap-around services for all affected by gender-based violence, the importance of culturally relevant and trauma-informed service providers and responders, as well as supporting needed targeted workforce development and retention solutions.

The Commission recommends the following:

1. Develop a Cook County coordinated strategic plan that centralizes information on resources and addresses gender-based violence, bringing together community leaders, County officials, and survivors to develop a coordinated approach.
2. Continue long-term investment and support of prevention programs and services for survivors and all affected by gender-based violence. The Commission recommends that Cook County continue to support these critical initiatives beyond the current two-year ARPA allocation.
  - Cook County recently launched the Domestic Violence Intervention and Support Services initiative, a \$5 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded program, managed by the Justice Advisory Program. This initiative builds off the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues recommendations from the previous year. The funding will go towards the following programs and initiatives:

- Provide counseling services for survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.
  - Legal services including representation and assistance in navigating the court system and preparing and accompanying victims and survivors through the legal process.
  - Connecting survivors and those affected by gender-based violence to resources through direct services, resource referrals, and staffing crisis hotlines.
  - Housing supports for victims and survivors of gender-based violence including rapid re-housing, shelters, hotel-based housing and more.
3. Invest in workforce behavioral health development initiatives and workforce pipelines to increase the number of practitioners and service providers supporting the holistic health needs of Gender-Based Violence survivors.
- More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the so-called Great Resignation has affected industries across the nation, including critical mental and behavioral healthcare workers. The Commission recommends the County, in partnership with Cook County Health, continue to invest in healthcare workforce development pipeline initiatives as well as support employee retention strategies:
    - Cook County Health should continue and be supported by the Board of Commissioners to develop and expand partnerships and initiatives with high schools, community colleges and universities to connect and inspire the next generation of healthcare and crisis response workers. These efforts strengthen local workforce and community through alleviating short- and long-term pipeline shortages.
    - In addition, the Commission recommends expanding successful programs such as the [Provident Scholarship Fund – Cook County Health](#), with an emphasis on behavioral health workers. This initiative is a partnership with the President's Office's Project Rainbow Initiative and we encourage its' expansion in supporting the need for targeted workforce development.

4. Invest and require trauma informed trainings for Cook County employees – especially those within the Cook County Health systems and Domestic Violence Court Division - from the Clerks to the Judge.
  - The Chicago Appleseed’s comprehensive evaluation of the Cook County Domestic Violence Division highlighted the need for staff at all levels to be trauma informed at all to increase access to quality of justice.<sup>1</sup>
  - The Cook County Health System currently partners with accredited organizations to provide ongoing trauma informed training for staff the Commission would recommend using this model as well as the established partnerships to provide trainings for all Cook County staff.
  
5. Provide and prioritize translation and language accessibility of services to and for survivors of gender-based violence, especially within the court systems.
  - Providing meaningful language access is critical to ensure equitable access to justice and safety for those impacted by gender-based violence.
  - Advocates have continuously highlighted the need for interpreters and translators within the court system who are also trauma-informed as they provide services at sensitive times for trauma-impacted populations.
  - The Network's language access policy and hotline services are a model for ensuring adequate and equitable services for survivors with limited English Proficiency.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago Appleseed (2022). *“Slipping Through the Cracks: An Evaluation of Cook County’s Domestic Violence Division in Chicago.”* <https://www.chicagoappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FINAL-DV-Report-August-2022.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Network. *Language Access Policy.* [Language Access Policy - The Network \(the-network.org\)](https://www.the-network.org/language-access-policy)

# Acknowledgements

The Cook County Commission on Women's Issues would like to thank the distinguished invited speakers who spoke at the December 2, 2021 Public Hearing: Sandy T. Williams, Erin Walton, Angela Sedeño Ph.D, Dr. Wanda Parker. The Commission would also like to thank Access Living as well as the Justice Advisory Council for their presentations throughout the year. Lastly, the the Commission would like to thank County staff who assisted in organizing the hearing and summarizing the report: Christina Rivero and Erin Hernandez.