

Good morning, Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member DeLauro and Subcommittee members.

My name is Katie Ray Jones, and I'm the President and Acting CEO of the National Domestic Violence Hotline. The Hotline is based in Austin, Texas and is funded on a competitive basis through the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Every day, our highly trained advocates answer nearly 700 calls, texts or chats from those affected by domestic and dating violence. We know that many victims are one call, text or chat away from serious, if not deadly, violence.

Recently, one of our advocates shared with me the story of a young woman who reached out to the Hotline in the middle of the night. The woman said she was crouching down in a corner of her closet. Her partner was sleeping only feet away. The woman shared that she was crying and shaking, but that she had seen the number to text for help earlier in the day and had saved it. She had finally got the courage to seek help. Thankfully, she got an immediate response. She said she wasn't safe, not even there in her closet, but that this was the only time, place, and way she could reach out for help. The young woman began to share her story and the conversation unfolded. By the end, the young woman heard much needed validation from a knowledgeable and compassionate advocate who offered steps to safely leave her dangerous situation when the time was right. Most important, she was given hope for a better future.

We know that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men 18 and older in the U.S. have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner. We know one in three young people report being abused in their dating relationships. So chances are you or someone you know has been affected by domestic or dating abuse. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is the only national resource that takes calls, texts and chats directly from victims and survivors of domestic abuse, their friends, and their families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We have the most comprehensive resource database in the country, with access to more than 4,500 providers and resources across the US, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and Guam.

Our teen dating abuse program, loveisrespect helps millions of young people seeking information about dating abuse and healthy vs. unhealthy relationships. They get this information through loveisrespect.org, interactive media, and text, chat and phone services provided by peer advocates. We help victims and their families and friends,

whether they are in the throes of an emergency, seeking local help, or just in need of someone to talk to at that moment. Our expertise is routinely sought by national and regional media, federal, state and local government, service providers, law enforcement and nonprofit colleagues.

Over the last 18 years, the Hotline has answered calls from more than 3.4 million victims. In 2013 alone, 331,078 people sought assistance from the Hotline; unfortunately, 77,484 contacts were not answered, due to a lack of resources. Over 6,300 of those who contacted the Hotline in 2013 were non-English speakers. The Hotline provides bilingual staffing and 24-hour access to interpreters in 200+ languages.

Ninety-five percent of those contacting us disclosed verbal and emotional abuse, while 70 percent reported physical abuse. Eight percent of contacts revealed sexual abuse. Nearly 30,000 victims disclosed legal issues, such as protective/restraining orders (60%), custody and visitation (33%), divorce (20%), and other legal matters. Over 20,000 victims disclosed instances of economic abuse, in which their partner forcibly took control or manipulated their finances in order to wield power over them. Nearly 7,000 victims experienced stalking. Over 5,000 victims disclosed instances of child abuse. Nearly 5,000 victims were struggling with issues related to immigration.

In 2013 alone, our websites were visited a total of 2,151,224 times: 636,404 visited TheHotline.org, and 1,514,820 visited loveisrespect.org for teens and young adults. Our expertise gained from working directly with victims is utilized frequently by shelters, community leaders, law enforcement and even classroom teachers.

The downtrend in the economy has impacted both victims and the local programs that serve them. A third of the victim callers surveyed had experienced a change in their financial situation in the previous year; 98% of those experienced an intensification of abuse during that same period.

But just as victims are reporting increased abuse, programs in the field are struggling. In 2013, the National Domestic Violence Hotline provided 126,305 referrals to domestic violence treatment providers and 36,840 referrals to additional resources across the nation. But the current economic climate has created a severe budget crisis for programs that provide safety and support for victims across the country. A 2013 survey of rape crisis centers by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence found that over one-third of programs have a waiting list for services such as counseling and support groups, while over half had to lay off staff. The survey found that 75% of rape crisis centers lost funding

in the past year through a combination of local, state and federal cuts. Over half of the programs experienced a reduction in staffing.

Victims of domestic violence have fewer places to turn, also. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence's 2013 *Domestic Violence Counts* annual census, in just one day last year, while more than 66,000 victims of domestic violence received services, over 9,640 requests for services went unmet, due to a lack of funding and resources. In 2013, domestic violence programs eliminated nearly 1,700 staff positions including counselors, advocate and children's advocate positions. They also had to reduce or completely eliminate over 1,280 services including emergency shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling.

We have seen the impact of these service cuts in our own work. While the Hotline offers important emergency and support services for victims of domestic and dating violence, and for some victims experiencing co-occurring sexual assault and stalking, our goal is to connect these victims with local programs that have the resources to help victims find shelter, transitional housing, legal assistance, and economic supports necessary to help them escape their abusers. Yet, we find, more and more often, as we try to make these referrals, that programs are no longer open in the evenings and on weekends. Other programs have had to lay off bilingual staff, and must call the Hotline to use our language translation services as they are working with victims who have come to their doors.

These local shortfalls of services have additional impacts on the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Because they are so understaffed, three state domestic violence hotlines have approached us to ask if they can roll their hotlines over to us either permanently or during these times of serious funding cuts. The National Domestic Violence Hotline was already unable to answer nearly 80,000 contacts last year due to a lack of resources. If we are not robustly funded through the Department of Health and Human Services and if victim services programs are not vigorously funded through the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, we will see these unanswered call numbers rise. And even for the calls we are able to answer, the local referrals which these victims' lives depend upon might not be available to help. We work in partnership with local, state, territorial and tribal programs. If any of us closes or reduces services because of funding shortfalls, everyone is impacted.

So while I'm grateful for the opportunity to be with you today to tell you about the wonderful work that the Hotline provides for victims of domestic violence and those close

to them, I am also here to ask that you do all you can to make sure that funding for the Hotline and services for the victims of domestic violence continues and grows.

We ask today for increased funding for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act programs. Specifically, at the Hotline, we are requesting a funding increase to 5 million dollars – up from 4.5 million. For shelters, we request an increase full funding. It is important that we restore resources and services in communities and save lives.

One of our current individual donors reached out recently to thank us. She makes a monthly contribution now to the Hotline. She does this because when she needed information on her abuse, she turned to our website. When her friends and family members didn't know what to do and because her abuser's violence was escalating she summoned the courage to call the Hotline. She got the help she needed to escape her situation and is now proud to call herself a survivor. She contributes to the organization because she wants to make sure someone will answer the phone when another victim needs a knowledgeable, compassionate voice. We need more success stories like these. Lives depend on the dedication of our advocates and the reliability of our service.

I have included in my written testimony the funding lines that will keep this field strong and able to help victims in the future.