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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division Staff 

DATE: October 11, 2025

RE: **REPORT EXPLORING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK FORCE**

City Council Member Angela Whitfield Calloway has requested the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) produce a report exploring the establishment of a Detroit City Council Domestic Violence Task Force.

During a City Council Formal Session presentation and discussion with the City of Detroit Law Department and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office on September 2, 2025. The Wayne County Prosecutor's Office indicated that it receives 10,000 domestic violence cases, half of which are "approved." This information prompted Council Member Whitfield Calloway to request the following report. This report explores: (1) the establishment of a Detroit City Council Domestic Violence Task Force, (2) issues surrounding domestic violence, and (3) recommendations to dismantle barriers to successful domestic violence prosecutions and providing victim support.

Please let us know how we can be of further assistance.

Background

Domestic violence is commonly defined as abusive behavior in personal relationships that allows one partner to intimidate, or to gain power and control over the other.¹ This includes physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse, as well as threats of violence or economic control.² Historically, through the late 1800s, violence and abuse committed against women within the confines of marriage was accepted as a husband's right. It wasn't until the late 1970s that domestic violence started gaining recognition as a crime of violence, and it took another 20 years for federal and state legislation to catch up, providing protection against, and serious punishment for, such acts.³

While the term was initially used to label physical assaults against women by their husbands. Acts of domestic violence are committed by both men and women, against spouses or same-sex partners. Modern domestic violence laws now extend to protect any members of the same household, including siblings, cohabiting individuals, and roommates. In the United States, an estimated 10 million people experience domestic violence every year.⁴ According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, about 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner.⁵

In a recent study which graded each state on its domestic violence laws, Michigan earned a C grade, reflecting a moderate level of support, finding notable gaps in shelter availability and limited gun law provisions. Perhaps most alarming was the finding that shelter access was 79% unmet in Michigan.⁶

Although, domestic violence and its effects stretch across all genders, cultures, and social status. Black women and children are disproportionately affected, especially in urban areas.⁷ Unique obstacles experienced by black women, such as socioeconomic disparities, historical trauma, cultural stigmas and lack of access to support services contribute to this growing crisis.⁸

According to the Detroit Police Department and domestic violence shelters, a concerning pattern developed during the pandemic with many women being quarantined with their abusers. Between March 2020 and March 2021 there were more than 1,300 reports of domestic violence.⁹ These numbers continue to climb with instances becoming increasingly tragic. At least four women have been killed in recent weeks due to domestic violence in Metro Detroit area.¹⁰

Some of the common causes of domestic violence are mental health problems, poverty and unemployment, lack of education, substance and alcohol abuse, suspicions of infidelity, and relationship retention.¹¹ Victims of abuse often lack the means to escape the situation, and low educational levels contribute to the inability of victims to leave due to economic factors.¹² In addition, young parents who might struggle economically or have lower education achievements can experience stressors leading to frustration, anger and/or depression.¹³ Alcohol and substance abuse have been known to play a part in violent behaviors, as well as jealousy.¹⁴

Local Domestic Violence Efforts

In recent years, Detroit's response landscape to intimate partner violence has combined municipal ordinance, prosecutorial reform, and enhanced survivor services to address both immediate harm and systemic breakdowns in police-victim interaction. Several local government agencies coordinate to provide support to victims of domestic violence (DV) in the City of Detroit. This local collaboration is an effort between the Third

¹ Legal Dictionary, *Domestic Violence*, <https://legaldictionary.net/domestic-violence/> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ World Population Review, *Domestic Violence by State*, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/domestic-violence-by-state> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

⁵ Id.

⁶ Milena J. Wisniewska, *Domestic Violence Statistics 2024*, Break The Cycle, <https://www.breakthecycle.org/domestic-violence-statistics> (Oct. 7, 2024) (Fact-checked) (citing state breakdowns) (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

⁷ Michigan Chronicle — Alarming Rise in Domestic Violence Rates in Detroit

Lynzee Mychael, *Alarming Rise in Domestic Violence Rates in Detroit Affecting Black Women and Children at Concerning Rates*, Mich. Chronicle (Nov. 5, 2023).

⁸ Id.

⁹ Dave Kinchen, *Rise in Metro Detroit Domestic Violence Deaths Spark Call for Change*, Fox 2 Detroit (Sep. 10, 2025), <https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/rise-metro-detroit-domestic-violence-deaths-spark-call-change> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Maggie Martinez & Rachael Pace, *10 Major Causes of Domestic Violence in Relationship* (Nov. 2023).

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id.

Judicial Circuit Court, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, law enforcement agencies, local shelters, and the Wayne County Clerk's Office. The effort is funded in part through VOCA grants, which provide victims with essential services, including guidance on their legal options, referrals to community resources, accompaniment to court proceedings, and the performance of follow-ups to ensure their safety.¹⁵

Serving as the initial point of contact for individuals seeking Personal Protection Orders (PPOs), the Wayne County Clerk's Office provides trained victim advocates who conduct one-on-one interviews to assist with the completion of the necessary court paperwork.¹⁶ The office works in close coordination with the Third Judicial Circuit Court through Family Division judges and provides support on all matters related to court filing, disposition, and the enforcement of Personal Protection Orders (PPOs).¹⁷ All DV victims are referred to appropriate law enforcement agencies to ensure that criminal activity is properly documented and investigated, while individuals involved in serious criminal matters may also be referred to the Prosecutor's Office.¹⁸ Cases involving landlord/tenant disputes are directed to the District Court and/or Legal Aid Services for resolution and referrals to the Department of Human Services are provided for individuals in need of housing, food, or shelter assistance. Free legal clinic referrals are offered to those who are indigent or require legal advice on matters such as housing, divorce, Friend of the Court issues, or landlord disputes.

At the state level, there are several legal mechanisms used to address intimate partner violence (IPV).¹⁹ Under the Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention and Treatment Act, the state supports a dedicated board and designated fund for programs and services aimed at preventing IPV and assisting survivors. Michigan law also provides specific protections and resources for survivors.²⁰ All law enforcement agencies must establish internal policies and provide training to personnel handling domestic violence calls. Universities benefiting from Title IX funding are mandated to train staff on issues related to sexual assault and physicians and medical facilities are required by law to report injuries caused by a deadly weapon to law enforcement authorities.²¹ The Whitmer administration and the Legislature have advanced complementary reforms that restrict firearm access for those convicted of domestic violence and strengthened court tools.²² However, though Michigan has implemented some DV/IPV-related legislation, a report from the Citizens Research Council has shown that additional policy interventions at the state level could further service improvements and prevention efforts.²³

On a municipal level, a legislative initiative spearheaded by Council Member Scott Benson has been among the most visible local policy moves; Benson introduced and helped pass the Sgt. Elaine Williams Domestic Violence Ordinance, facilitating the removal of firearms from individuals convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence, enabling the prosecution of this misdemeanor offense at the city level, an effort to reduce lethality in domestic incidents.²⁴

The state and local legal reforms sit alongside a system of advocacy and survivor services offered in Wayne County and Detroit. Groups such as First Step and the SASHA Center provide on-site advocacy services, culturally

¹⁵ Wayne County Clerk, *Victim Advocacy Program*, Wayne County, Mich., <https://www.waynecountymi.gov/Government/Elected-Officials/Clerk/Civil-Court-Services/Victim-Advocacy-Program> (last visited Sept. 13, 2025).

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ Wayne County Victim Advocacy Program, Wayne County, Mich., *Victim Advocacy Program*, <https://www.waynecountymi.gov/Government/Elected-Officials/Clerk/Civil-Court-Services/Victim-Advocacy-Program> (last visited Sept. 13, 2025).

¹⁸ Id.

¹⁹ Karley Abramson, *Michigan Can Do More To Combat Intimate Partner Violence*, Citizens Research Council of Michigan (Mar. 27, 2023), <https://crcmich.org/michigan-can-do-more-to-combat-intimate-partner-violence>.

²⁰ Karley Abramson, *Michigan Can Do More To Combat Intimate Partner Violence*, Citizens Research Council of Michigan (Mar. 27, 2023), <https://crcmich.org/michigan-can-do-more-to-combat-intimate-partner-violence>.

²¹ Id.

²² Office of Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Gov. Whitmer Signs Gun Violence Prevention Legislation to Keep Guns Out of the Hands of Criminals (Nov. 20, 2023), Michigan.gov, <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2023/11/20/whitmer-signs-gun-violence-prevention-legislation-to-keep-guns-out-of-the-hands-of-criminals> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); Michigan Legislature, Summary as Passed by the Senate, Senate Bill 528 / related domestic violence penal code amendments (Oct. 16, 2023), <https://legislature.mi.gov/documents/2023-2024/billanalysis/House/pdf/2023-HLA-0471-E80212C0.pdf> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); Michigan State Court Administrative Office / MDHHS, reporting on red flag/no-gun orders and gun-violence prevention task force work (Oct. 22, 2024), Michigan.gov, <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/inside-mdhhs/newsroom/2024/10/22/gvp-taskforce> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

²³ Id.

²⁴ Detroit City Council, Memorandum regarding Sgt. Elaine Williams Domestic Violence Ordinance (Oct. 2021), City of Detroit, <https://pub-detroitmi.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=53456> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); Craig Mauger, Detroit City Council approves ordinance to strip guns from those convicted of domestic violence, Detroit Free Press (Oct. 27, 2021), <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2021/10/27/detroit-domestic-violence-convictions-firearm-ownership/8549736002/> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); WXYZ Detroit, "This will help save lives." Detroit approves ordinance taking guns from domestic violence offenders (Oct. 27, 2021), <https://www.wxyz.com/news/this-will-help-save-lives-detroit-approves-ordinance-taking-guns-from-domestic-violence-offenders> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).

specific trauma services, and community response programs that aim to increase reporting, provide victim support and safety planning to mitigate the risk that survivors will decline to cooperate with law enforcement if trust is low.²⁵

Establishing a Task Force

The successful prosecution of domestic violence cases in Detroit is challenged by an interconnected set of challenges with victim retraction and non-cooperation among the attributable safety concerns. There have been calls for improved police response and heightened accountability from law enforcement to intervene more effectively. In addition, there is a cry for bureaucrats to make it easier for victims to obtain Personal Protection Orders (PPOs) and strengthen the enforcement of these orders. Victims are now reported to be younger than ever before, as domestic violence has become prevalent amongst dating aged teens. Thus, convening a task force to confront these issues is a worthwhile exploration.

Task Forces are temporary bodies tasked with conducting informed discussions regarding a specific issue and providing recommendations correlative to their findings. The Detroit City Council can establish a Task Force to study any issue which the body feels it can benefit by convening a group of experts, specialists, and stakeholders, for the purpose of finding a solution to a complex problem. Domestic violence is an escalating problem in our community. A task force aiming to reduce domestic violence could pursue both structural reforms and strategic coordination. At the state level, the task force could lead a lobbying agenda to push for stronger enforcement of no gun and protection orders. The task force could formalize a subcommittee that convenes all existing domestic violence agencies, including agencies like the SASHA Center, First Step, Avalon Healing, local hospital advocacy units, and legal services groups, to align referral pathways, data sharing, and joint training. This subcommittee can also collaborate with the Wayne County Clerk's Victim Advocacy Program, which already assists survivors filing PPOs and provides court accompaniment to ensure one seamless continuum from filing to prosecution.

In addition, the task force could partner with the Family Court Awareness Month Committee (FCAMC) to build public education campaigns and engage court actors, guardians ad litem, and child welfare personnel in trauma informed domestic violence practices. It could also develop and maintain a comprehensive, updatable resource guide (print, web, and mobile) for survivors, practitioners, law enforcement, and courts that lists legal, health, housing, mental health, safety, and economic support services. Task force leadership could work with Wayne County's court systems to pilot "navigator" positions embedded within family courts to reduce attrition of victim engagement and improve cooperation rates. Together, these measures would create a unified infrastructure that enhances state legislative support, improves interagency coordination, reduces gaps for survivors, and restores confidence so that cooperation with law enforcement and prosecution can become more feasible and safer.

Council Member Calloway could also consider consolidating the existing Human Trafficking Task Force with domestic violence efforts to form a unified Victims of Domestic Violence and Exploitation Task Force. Combining these initiatives would allow the city to address overlapping patterns of coercion, power imbalance, and victimization that frequently intersect across both forms of abuse. Survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking often encounter the same systemic barriers, including limited access to safe housing, trauma-informed legal support, and coordinated service delivery. A single task force would streamline citywide communication, reduce duplication of outreach and allow service agencies to coordinate their advocacy under one comprehensive strategy. Establishing a subcommittee structure within a joint task force could also ensure that specialized attention is given to the distinct legal and social dimensions of both domestic violence and trafficking while maintaining a unified policy voice before the state. The Legislative Policy Division stands ready to draft a resolution for either. Please advise as to how you would like us to proceed.

²⁵ First Step, Community Response Program, First Step Wayne County (service organization web page), <https://www.firststep-mi.org/communityresponse/> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); SASHA Center, Welcome to SASHA Center (organizational site), <https://www.sashacenter.org/> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025); U.S. Dep't of Justice / National Institute of Justice, Practical Implications of Current Domestic Violence Research, NIJ.gov (special report), <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/225722.pdf> (last visited Oct. 11, 2025).