

# The Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network Report



Inform. Influence. Impact.

Convened by the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute  
December 2017





## Note from the Coordinator

**Dear Survivors Network,**

Thank you for a powerful year of transformation and learning. Since our last convening in December 2016, we have accomplished so much together. Your power and persistence to inform, influence and impact how society views us and our loved ones is so moving.

The Peace Institute's role in the Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network is to provide technical support and offer consultation to survivors and survivor-led organizations. We have had the honor of sitting with some of you. Better Opportunities, Inc., Survivors of Homicide Ministry at Morning Star Baptist Church, We Are Rising, We Are Better Together: The Warren Daniel Hairston Project, Women Survivors of Homicide Movement, My Brother's Keeper 617, Legacy Lives On. These are just a few members of this Survivors Network who have allowed us in to support their missions, and we hope more survivors will allow us to be part of your process.

As we move into 2018, I am excited to hear what each of you have planned and what your visions are for the New Year. Even if it's just an idea, the Survivors Network is here to provide some technical support and consultation. We are here to support you as you put a plan and action to your vision.

Thank you for all the work you do to honor our loved ones and uplift our families and communities.

**Peace,**

  
Alexandra Chery



## Looking back at 2017

Last December more than 150 survivors came together for the inaugural convening of the Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network. Even though it was our kickoff event, it felt like a family reunion. We have been there for each other since our loved ones were murdered; we held one another up so we could get to the other side of our pain and anger.

Throughout 2017, we worked together intentionally using our experience and expertise to inform, influence, and impact the way society views homicide victims and their families. We set some goals when we came together last year and we've accomplished or made major strides toward all of them.

**Outreach and Relationship Building** – We have been intentional about getting to know one another more deeply and supporting each other's events, trainings, and calls to action. This November 20th – December 20th is the **17th Annual Survivors of Homicide Victims Awareness Month** and there are dozens of events organized and attended by survivors across the state!

We had another successful Opening Ceremony at the State House this year, hosted by Senator Linda Dorcena Forry with remarks by Representative Evandro Carvalho, Representative Harold Naughton, and Executive Director of the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance Liam Lowney.

We also recognized **Clarissa Turner of Legacy Lives On** and **My Brother's Keeper 617** with the Inform, Influence Impact Award.

*"By working together to promote Survivors of Homicide Victims Awareness Month, we can learn how to better assist the loved ones who have been impacted by violence and learn how to support survivors and their efforts to promote future violence prevention. I am proud of the hard work we as a community have been able to accomplish towards violence prevention and the promotion of peace in the wake of tragedy."*

– Representative Harold Naughton



My Brother's Keeper 617, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping youth in the Boston community, has created bonds between youth and allows them to express their hidden talents through mentoring programs, activities, and sports.

Legacy Lives On, a non-profit ministry organization, provides ongoing support to families affected by homicide and makes sure our loved ones are never forgotten.

**Survivors Leadership Academy** – We're so proud of the survivors who completed the Fall 2017 session of Survivors Leadership Academy! Peace Institute staff facilitated the course with our partners at VISIONS, Inc. The goal of the Survivors Leadership Academy is to give family members of homicide victims the tools and support they need to transform their pain and anger into power and action.

Each graduate became a member of the Survivors Network with new skills to support other families of murder victims. These new members of our network are leaders who are committed to making our communities more peaceful places to live.

**Budget Advocacy** – The Peace Institute and the Survivors Network worked together to advocate for \$200,000 line item in the FY2018 state budget for survivors of homicide victims. When the Peace Institute receives the funds, \$100,000 will go toward our programs and \$100,000 will be granted to organizations in the Survivors Network that are providing critical services or leading groundbreaking healing and violence prevention.

Our team has developed a simple, fair grantmaking process so survivors can apply for funding for their event, project, or organization. Survivors can also receive technical assistance from the Peace Institute to help with strategic planning, budgeting, project and organizational development to increase their capacity to do healing and peacemaking work.

**Amend Victim Compensation Statute** – In January 2017, Representative Evandro Carvalho filed House Bill 742 "An Act Amending Victim Compensation Statute" and we came together as survivors so that families like ours won't be denied funeral and burial reimbursement due to the circumstances surrounding their loved one's murder.





Too many families are re-traumatized when they are eventually denied by Victim Compensation because of a clause in the state statute that requires a family's claim be reduced or denied in the event their loved one "contributed to" their own death. When families are denied Victim Compensation, they're punished for their loved one's murder.

The Survivors Network believes it is a human right to lay your loved one to rest with respect and dignity, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their death. We organized a community conversation to talk about the impact of Victim Compensation on our families. We held planning dinners for survivors to come in and prepare testimony in support of H.742.

Our network led a statewide effort to demand dignity and compassion for our families. Survivors, providers, and allies called, emailed, and visited their legislators then we testified before the Joint Committee in September. We submitted dozens of pages of powerful testimony and pulled together a coalition letter of support signed by more than forty organizations.

*"Not only was the scrutinizing of my husband's history demeaning to his character at his time of death, but also very antagonistic to me, mentally and emotionally for me to go through at the most terrifying, vulnerable point in my life." – Ebony LePenn, wife of Anthony Clay*

*"This issue is important to me because the violent loss of a loved one is in itself a traumatic, soul numbing, and heart-stopping moment. It's incomparable; a shock to your soul, to your world. One cannot think or rationalize what is happening, what, where to go, who to see. The surviving family members of homicide victims are also victims ourselves. One is not able to grieve a murdered loved one because our thoughts are on how to bury my child, my wife, my husband, my cousin, where and who do we turn to. Do you believe you can imagine just how lost and lonely that is? Believe me you cannot imagine because you are impotent when this happens, if you have a PhD, MD, or any other acronym - it does not matter. You are lost." – Julia Thompson, aunt of Louis D. Brown*

Because of the organizing the Survivors Network did, an amendment with our Victim Compensation language was adopted in the final House Criminal Justice Reform Omnibus bill in November. A similar amendment filed was also adopted by the Senate. The two criminal justice bills will now be considered by a Conference Committee. We will continue to advocate for this important change to become law.



**Media Coverage** – Survivors were showcased in the news several times in 2017. “Living with Loss” on WCVB was a special segment that featured survivors sharing their healing strategies and how they honor the legacy of their loved one as they move forward in their lives. Pastors Ron and Kim Odom, in honor of their son Steven P. Odom; Annetta Dingle-Smith, in honor of her son Antoine Marquis Dingle-Knight; and Claudette Jones, in honor of her twin brother Clyde Jones met beforehand to prepare and then filmed the segment at the Peace Institute. Ruth Rollins, mother of Warren Daniel Hairston and founder of We are Better Together: The Warren Daniel Hairston Project, was featured on an NBC Boston segment about the importance of receiving Survivors Outreach Services in the aftermath of murder. Sharon Baker, mother of Tyrelle Baker, was featured on a segment about the harmful impacts of the current Victim Compensation law on NECN. Carla Sheffield, founder of Better Opportunities, Inc., told the story of her son Burrell Ramsey’s murder by police in the national media outlet the Establishment. We’re so grateful for these survivors’ courage and clarity. Thank you for speaking your truth.

## Looking ahead to 2018

In 2018, our focus will be continuing to strengthen the connections between members of the Survivors Network. We’re working on building an online platform where survivors can support and strategize with each other privately.

Survivors Network members participated in the We’re Still Here Writing Workshop with Michael Patrick MacDonald, and continue to stay connected through the alumnae group. They will be working on an anthology of their stories. We also plan to offer more advanced trainings beyond the Survivors Leadership Academy so survivors who have already completed the course can continue to have leadership development opportunities. We’re inspired by survivors who are providing direct services to fellow families of murder victims. We’re going to facilitate a training on how to use the **Survivors’ Burial and Resource Guide** plus other tools and strategies to serve and support families in your community when a homicide happens.

We also want to build on the momentum from the organizing we did to support H.742 by offering some more advanced advocacy training for survivors of homicide victims who want to use their experience and expertise to affect public policy.

We’ll be reaching out to the Survivors Network seeking your input and guidance. Look out for ongoing emails about events and efforts led by fellow members of the Survivors Network. We hope we survivors will continue to stand by each other and work in solidarity across the state!

If you ever have questions, comments, or concerns about the Survivors Network you can reach out to **Alexandra@Ldbpeaceinstitute.org** at any time.