



## State Funding for Sexual Violence Prevention January 2021

The prevention of sexual violence has always been a fundamental component of the missions of state and territory sexual assault coalitions across the country. Increased attention to racial justice and police brutality has made it ever more evident that the criminal legal response to sexual violence has had limited impact on its overall reduction. Investment in efforts to change norms, attitudes, and culture that contribute to violence and abuse is essential. The federal Rape Prevention Education (RPE) program provides a small amount of funding to states and territories; advocacy to increase these resources is a key policy priority for the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) and sexual assault coalitions because the current funding level is not nearly enough to develop and sustain comprehensive primary prevention efforts. Most states do not have dedicated funding from state governments to supplement and expand the work of federally funded primary prevention. This paper will explore the experience of 3 states, California, Massachusetts, and Virginia, that have had success in their advocacy for prevention specific state funding directed to addressing sexual and domestic violence. It will also describe promising approaches in Colorado and Ohio. While the current economic crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic casts a shadow on the certainty of future resources, these stories illustrate pathways for consideration toward a goal of increased prevention capacity.

### Targeted Prevention Line Items: Success in 3 states

#### California

In 2011/2012, the **California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA)** commissioned a report to identify the cost of sexual violence in California—how much was the state spending in response to sexual violence and its effects? Researchers calculated tangible costs—medical, mental health, prevention, investigation, sanctioning, treatment, and victim services—as well as intangible costs such as lost work productivity and quality of life. The [Cost and Consequences of Sexual Violence in California](#)

report was published in 2018 and revealed that the cost of sexual violence in California in 2012 alone was \$140 billion. Upon the release of the report, CALCASA partnered with the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence to launch an effort to advocate for prevention funding through the state’s general fund. CALCASA focused all of their policy efforts into this campaign during that time. Key to their success were two legislative champions in the CA State Assembly with power in the budget process. CALCASA educated these legislators, who had a personal connection to domestic violence, about sexual violence, its effects, and the importance of prevention.



In advocating for prevention resources, it was very important for advocates to emphasize to state legislators that federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) dollars in California are solely intended for much needed direct services, and that prevention work is not allowable under the grant program. (Note: Only \$45,000 is allocated for sexual violence services in California and it funds only one program. Comparatively, domestic violence services are allocated \$20m). In the first year of the Coalitions' advocacy efforts, then-Governor Jerry Brown approved \$10m in the budget for prevention: \$5m for sexual violence and \$5m for domestic violence. In 2019, Governor Newsome approved a reduced amount of \$5m through a grant program, with the intent of equitable distribution between sexual and domestic violence programs. The fund distribution process was delayed while the implementation and allocation processes were developed. CALCASA enjoys a positive relationship with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, which monitors all sexual and domestic violence funds, including this new program. The funds were ready to be distributed in February and subsequently delayed by COVID-19. In fact, the \$5m was reclaimed by the Governor due to the California budget situation. Fortunately, the legislature stepped in to protect the funding and ensure that the money remained, evidence of the hard work of CALCASA and other advocates in educating legislators about the importance of sexual and domestic violence prevention.

CALCASA was very involved with the decision-making around funding distribution in the state, and also received technical assistance funding to support the programs that would be awarded grants. They advocated that the funding be directed to community-based organizations with established prevention programs of at least two years, and not solely sexual and/or domestic violence programs. The goal was to open the funding up to emerging and promising programs and not only those that have been established for many years.

In 2020, CALCASA had planned to advocate for an increase of this line item to \$15m, and it remains their biggest policy priority. They are committed to ensuring that the funding is annualized in the budget. Advocacy decisions are being heavily weighed due to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and the uncertain forecast. A key advocacy point is that every risk factor for sexual violence has also increased over the many months of the pandemic. If prevention is not addressed now, the cost and consequences will be greater in years to come.

## **Massachusetts**

For the past 10 years the main policy priority for **Jane Doe Inc. (JDI), the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence**, has been to increase funding for sexual and domestic violence services in Massachusetts. During the recession of 2009, significant cuts were made to state funding for programs, most significantly to sexual violence program funding. In response, the Coalition's strategy was to advocate for restoration of services funding, and ultimately for increased service capacity across the Commonwealth. This advocacy has been very successful over time, as evidenced by funding restoration and more than \$6m additional combined sexual and domestic violence funding increases over the past 10 years.

JDI has always prioritized prevention work as part of its comprehensive approach, although not necessarily as a budget priority. They have been a leader in the movement to engage men and boys to prevent sexual and domestic violence through their multi-year White Ribbon Campaign, which engaged policy makers, community leaders, and youth across Massachusetts to be part of the solution to end gender-based violence. With the restoration and increase of service dollars and growth in visibility of the prevention work of the Coalition and local programs, JDI and its members began to more intentionally include the need for an investment in prevention as they advocated for service dollars.

JDI and local sexual and domestic violence programs have historically had the support of the Massachusetts Governor’s Office and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services— regardless of which party is in leadership—and of many legislators in the state legislature. The administration of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito engaged with JDI from the very beginning of their time in office. Lt. Governor Polito has been visibly involved in the leadership of the Governor’s Council to Address Sexual and Domestic Violence and has intentionally visited many local sexual and domestic violence programs to better understand community needs. JDI quickly established relationships with the LG and the incoming Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mary Lou Sudders, partnerships that have grown over time.



As a result of conversations and advocacy, the first intentional step toward state prevention funding was made by the Governor’s office with the addition of \$500,000 into the existing sexual and domestic services line item, intended as a set-aside to develop a prevention public awareness campaign in FY2018. The campaign, focusing on healthy relationships, was created with the leadership of and participation from JDI, JDI member programs, and a diverse group of stakeholders, including a youth advisory committee. It was launched in 2019: [RESPECTfully](#)

The following year, the Governor proposed a Healthy Relationships Grant Program line item at \$1m as an extension of this project. While a version of this line item had existed for several years previously, it was never funded over \$300,000 and in some years the grants were never awarded. This new investment created a broader opportunity for sexual and domestic violence prevention, requiring a planning process led by the Department of Public Health, with input from JDI and other stakeholders.

In 2020, five grants were awarded from the Healthy Relationships Grant Program, ranging from \$160,000-\$190,000. Each grant supports a partnership that may include local sexual and domestic violence programs, schools, and culturally specific community and youth organizations. Each 3-year project focuses on marginalized communities—LGBQ/T, Black, Latinx, homeless, immigrant youth, and youth with disabilities. All funded programs are required to be “evidence-informed” although not necessarily “evidence-based.” The shared perspective is that to effect change within diverse communities, prevention cannot be one-size-fits-all.

JDI plans continued advocacy for additional prevention dollars, to fund more projects and impact more communities. However, given that the state now projects a \$2-\$8 billion budget deficit, the concern is that this new prevention funding is at risk of being cut. As with the last recession, many programs and support for individuals face potential reduction or elimination.

## Virginia

Advocacy efforts to procure state prevention funding in Virginia began in 2006-07 as the Commonwealth was undergoing needs and resource assessments through the RPE and Delta federal prevention programs. Through the assessment process, recommendations for building out prevention infrastructure in Virginia were developed. During this same period of time, then-Governor Tim Kaine established a Sexual Violence Commission to look at issues including sexual violence on higher education campuses and access to forensic nursing. The **Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance** brought the prevention recommendations from the needs and resource assessments to the attention of the administration and to the table of the Governor's Commission. As a result, the Commission made recommendations that were a catalyst for the Governor's proposal in the state budget for \$300,000-\$400,000 in funding for prevention. Unfortunately, the legislature did not adopt the Governor's proposal and the Action Alliance turned its attention to the \$18m gap in service dollars needed to support survivors.

The work of 2006-07 set the stage for a reemerging focus on prevention funding several years later. At the request of the membership, the Alliance successfully advocated for the establishment of the Building Healthy Futures Fund, financed by personalized license plate fees. The Fund was created in 2014 specifically to provide resources for prevention programming at local sexual and domestic violence programs. The sale of "peace begins at home" license plates has generated a small but growing amount of revenue to date. Some local programs are now receiving up to \$10,000 in grants from the fund. This successful effort motivated the Action Alliance to consider again whether it was time for a larger prevention ask from the state government.



Virginia's Sexual & Domestic Violence Advisory Council, a statewide collaborative and legislatively authorized entity, established a subcommittee in 2019 to work on a state budget recommendation for prevention. About 20 programs with varying levels of prevention experience engaged in a process over 6-8 months, organizing and seeking feedback from member programs. Information gathered from programs included current percentages of program staff dedicated to prevention vs. intervention, what they thought an ideal ratio would be, and what the appropriate amount of funding would be to start up and/or sustain a prevention program that included at least one full-time, dedicated position.

The Action Alliance was engaged in all aspects of this effort: drafting and advocating for the legislation to create the fund, identifying the agency that would house the fund, creating the request for applicants (RFA)/granting process in partnership with funding agencies, developing

ongoing program evaluation, and advocating to ensure the new funding would not create burdens for programs. While the program is still in development, it is anticipated that key funded projects will be “evidence-based” or “evidence-informed,” and operated by a local public or private nonprofit agency that has the primary purpose of preventing sexual and domestic violence through strategies that: (a) promote the development and maintenance of healthy practices related to relationships, sexuality, and social-emotional development and, (b) counteract the factors associated with the initial perpetration of sexual and domestic violence.” (<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+CHAP0912>)

In March 2020, the Legislature statutorily established the prevention fund with the expectation that on July 1, it would be funded at \$1.5m. In April, as a result of COVID-19, many appropriations were re-directed to the public health response, including new discretionary programs such as this one.

Upon reflection, Action Alliance staff would consider more intentional coalition building work with child and family services and other prevention professionals. This prevention funding request, while very much a matter of child and family health and resilience, is a request that ultimately competes with those from other state and local child and family services and prevention agencies. While legislative funding decisions are never easy, it might have been made easier to have consolidated efforts with in-home care providers (such as Parents as Teachers programs) and other initiatives intended to reduce and prevent childhood trauma. “Preventing violence before it can happen,” states Policy Director Jonathan Yglesias, “is critical to our work on behalf of survivors, families, and communities. Bringing policy leaders on board with our vision for a Virginia without sexual and domestic violence is a necessary step in ensuring that every child has the conditions necessary to fully thrive.”

The Action Alliance continues to advocate that funding be re-appropriated to the prevention program. While the future of funding is unclear, the statutory language now exists, and the Action Alliance is optimistic that state investments in prevention will grow. The long-term plan is to build on the funding once it is appropriated—making sure evaluation is included in order to demonstrate that the programs are effective, and therefore show the need for increased capacity to prevent violence across the Commonwealth.

## **Other Promising Approaches**

### **Colorado**

Colorado has no dedicated state budget funding for sexual and domestic violence prevention or intervention. However, the state did take a step forward with the approval of \$500,000 from the federal CARES act to support community-based sexual and domestic violence services. This action has created a budget line item for community-based sexual/domestic violence programs upon which to build a sustainable/new funding source in future years.

Meanwhile, the **Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA)** supported recent parole reforms via legislative act [HB 17-1326](#) which, in addition to substantial parole reforms, created the statutory framework for a crime prevention initiative in two Colorado communities disproportionately impacted by over-policing and mass incarceration. The act redirects \$4m annually from the Department of Corrections budget, created by “savings” from parole reforms, to fund the initiative. By funding community-based programs with priorities set and agreed to by the communities receiving the funding, proponents believe that crime, including sexual violence, can be prevented using this pilot as a guide. Funded programs will focus on a wide range of programs for youth directed at reducing recidivism, developing skills and resiliency, increasing academic achievement, addressing systemic causes of disparities, and improving community-based supports to reduce family violence and neglect. Several CCASA member programs were granted funding. “Part of this program’s success,” according to Raana Simmons, CCASA Director of Policy, “is that the grantors are community-based agencies that are a part of and work in impacted communities....This is the type of directed funding that I hope to see more of so that we can actually make meaningful contributions to the movement to end gender-based violence.”

Another initiative in Colorado that CCASA supported and for which it is an appointed oversight member is [HB 19-1032](#), concerning Comprehensive Human Sexuality Education. This pilot program provides funding for K-12 schools to facilitate comprehensive sexual health education. The law also updated language clarifying that “comprehensive” sexual health education includes information on consent, is medically accurate, avoids shame-based and stigmatizing language, and includes health information that meets the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth.

## **Ohio**

In 2019, the **Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV)** saw great success in their advocacy to increase state funding for sexual violence programs by 227%: from \$1.45m to \$4.25m. The expansion effort was intended to increase capacity for programs to not only provide services but to expand outreach and prevention work. Prior to this, many programs in Ohio did not have resources for prevention work. OAESV staff took a very deliberative approach, meeting with 77 lawmakers individually between November and April and creating a packet of information answering every question that Legislators asked. Conversations were tailored to the community needs of each legislator—whether it be the need for prevention or the gaps in services. In-person advocacy with legislators and early meetings with leaders were critical to this effort, according to Camille Crary, OAESV Director of Legal Services and Policy.

As part of this year’s budget advocacy efforts, OAESV is creating and sharing weekly recorded broadcasts with sexual violence program directors discussing the impact of cuts on their programs and in their communities. Another strategy is to bring the stories of programs and survivors to policymakers as they make critical decisions for the future.

## Conclusion

An investment in sexual violence prevention work is essential for local communities to concentrate efforts on building up protective factors and ameliorating risk factors for violence. This will not be easy nor will one broad solution be effective for all states and communities. The impact of small projects with localized approaches will bear out over time. What we know from the experiences of the coalitions that contributed to this article is that there are multiple pathways to get there. Important components of their demonstrated success include:

- *Leadership allies.* Legislators, administrators, researchers and others are essential for developing and introducing funding proposals and leading them through the governmental process. Strong, trusted relationships built over time serve coalitions in all of their advocacy efforts. Education is critical.
- *Data.* Policymakers need data, needs assessment findings, and other talking points to educate themselves and to educate others. Prevention related data can be challenging but presenting information about costs of sexual violence and the lack of reduction in sexual violence over time are compelling arguments for prevention.
- *Engagement of member programs and impacted communities.* Those who live and work in individual communities can best identify and illustrate these and deliver the message most effectively. They are the best informants of what will make a difference in their communities and know what is possible.
- *Innovation.* Think expansively about the ways in which prevention efforts can have impact, and therefore engage with a diversity of stakeholders with whom sexual and domestic violence prevention organizations can build coalitions.
- *The Coalition.* Sexual assault coalitions have the ability and capacity to bring all many constituencies together. As leaders in the movement to end gender-based violence, coalitions have established reputations of credibility and connections with a broad reach both within states/territories and with one another nationally. Coalitions can play a significant role in not only advocating for resources but advising on implementation of resources, ensuring that the values and tenets of sexual violence prevention, including equity and justice, are at the core.

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