



Proposal to Restructure the San Mateo County Domestic Violence Council

To: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

From: San Mateo County Domestic Violence Council

Recommendation: Dissolve the Domestic Violence Council as Currently Structured and Restructure to Enhance Effectiveness and Expand Scope

Background

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors formed the Domestic Violence Council (DVC) in 1998 pursuant to [Penal Code Section 14140](#), which encourages counties to establish a county task force on violent crimes against women. The DVC has provided critical leadership in addressing domestic violence in San Mateo County but faces structural limitations in its current formation that hinder its ability to respond effectively to urgent needs.

As a body subject to the Brown Act, the DVC as currently structured faces particular challenges, including that it must:

- Conduct all business in public meetings, where maintaining safety and confidentiality for survivors is not possible.
- Allow a designated period and format for public comment, with a set time limit per speaker, which restricts ability to engage with commenters and limits opportunities for meaningful discussion.
- Ensure that no more than half of its members discuss issues outside of meetings, which creates communication challenges since many of the DVC members are County staff and creates constraints on full participation in working sessions, including, for example, upcoming strategic planning for the County's proposed Family Justice Center.

Along with creating safety concerns for survivors, these restrictions create barriers to swift action, including limited flexibility, reduced efficiency, and slowed progress on urgent issues.

In 2023, the DVC created the DVC Task Force, an ad hoc committee not required to hold agendaized public meetings under the Brown Act. As a result, the Task Force has been more nimble and effective in making progress on policies and gaps in services, resulting in advancing several initiatives, including conducting a Family Justice Center community input session, conducting Family Justice Center tours throughout California, facilitating the creation of the High-Risk Case Domestic Violence Multidisciplinary Team, and facilitating the establishment of the Domestic Violence Emergency Response Team (DVERT).

In addition to these procedural constraints, the current structure of the DVC limits its scope to domestic violence. By contrast, [Penal Code Section 14140](#), which led to the creation of the DVC, does not restrict its focus to domestic violence, focusing instead on all violent crimes against women. The intersections between domestic violence and sexual violence are undeniable—many survivors experience multiple forms of abuse, often at the hands of the same perpetrators. By restructuring the DVC to expand its focus to include in its scope sexual violence along with domestic violence, the restructured body will have the opportunity to make more meaningful progress in preventing and addressing a broader spectrum of violence and exploitation.

On April 10, 2025, the Domestic Violence Council approved of the following Recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

Recommendation

The DVC recommends that the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors dissolve the DVC in its current form. After so doing, the County Executive should consider restructuring the body as a function within the County Executive's Office or other appropriate County Office or Department and expanding the scope to include sexual violence. This new structure may fall under the portfolio of the County Executive's Office (e.g., the Women and Children's Officer) or other appropriate County Office or Department. In the future, this function could also be considered for incorporation into a Family Justice Center once a Center is formally established.

The restructured body should be formed to address domestic violence—including but not limited to the expanded working definition of domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act—and sexual violence in closer alignment with the goals of Penal Code Section 14140 and allowing for more nimble and responsive action.

Benefits of restructuring may include:

1. **Improved Communication & Collaboration:** By allowing open, timely communication not subject to the Brown Act, members can engage in continuous and responsive discussions to address emerging and urgent issues.
2. **Increased Efficiency:** A restructured body can convene more frequently and work dynamically without requiring a formal quorum or a strict, inflexible agenda.
3. **Broader Scope:** Expanding the focus to include sexual violence will align with best practices in victim services.
4. **Survivor Representation:** Ensuring a survivor advisory member provides critical lived-experience perspectives to guide policy and initiatives.
5. **Alignment with Future Family Justice Center:** Structuring the body within the County Executive's Office or other appropriate County Office or Department will allow for active participation in Family Justice Center establishment and ongoing support.
6. **Flexible Meeting Schedule:** The new body should meet at a minimum of four times per year but would have the flexibility to meet as often as necessary to address pressing issues.

Proposed Structure and Membership

The newly structured body should:

- **Expand its scope** to include sexual violence, along with domestic violence, against people of all gender identities, including but not limited to the definition under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act.
- **Include survivors as members** of the body via a Survivor Advisory that will be formed as part of the forthcoming Family Justice Center.
- **Consider a mechanism for receiving input from survivors** and community members.
- **Be housed within the County Executive's Office or other appropriate County Office or Department** until a Family Justice Center is established, at which point moving the body to be housed within that organization should be considered.
- **Be composed of key stakeholders**, which may include:
 - Community-based domestic violence victim service provider
 - Community-based sexual violence victim service provider
 - Community-based service provider for non-violence and rehabilitation
 - A Survivor Advisory representative, once it has been formed
 - Family Justice Center leadership
 - San Mateo County Supervisor
 - County Executive's Office representative
 - District Attorney's Office representative
 - Coroner's Office representative
 - Public safety representative
 - Health and Human Services Agency representative
 - Representatives from the judiciary, including family law courts
 - Legal aid representative specializing in family law
 - San Mateo County Office of Education representative
- Report to Board of Supervisors annually, at a minimum

Conclusion

Dissolving the Domestic Violence Council in its current form and recommending that the County Executive identify an appropriate County Office or Department to oversee a restructured body will create a more effective and responsive body to address intimate partner violence and sexual violence in San Mateo County. The Domestic Violence Council recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve this dissolution and restructuring effective immediately to maximize impact and improve service coordination for survivors, ultimately resulting in making families and individuals safer in San Mateo County.