



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
DISTRICT 2
File #: 22-840

Board Meeting Date: 11/1/2022

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Supervisor Carole Groom, District 2
Subject: Appointments to the San Mateo County Domestic Violence Council

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation for first full term appointments to the San Mateo County Domestic Violence Council:

- A) Nicole Reyes, Staff Attorney, Bay Area Legal Aid, representing a non-profit agency providing legal services to battered women, for a first full term from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2025; and
- B) Stephanie Bilinski, Pro Bono Director of The Legal Aid Society, representing an agency providing legal services to battered women, for a first full term from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2023; and
- C) Karen Ferguson, Executive Director of Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA), representing a non-profit agency serving battered women, for a first full term from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2025.

BACKGROUND:

The San Mateo County Domestic Violence Council is responsible for establishing policies to reduce and prevent domestic violence and enhance victim's services.

Members of the Domestic Violence Council evaluate, make recommendations, and initiate activities regarding current response of law enforcement, the judicial system, health care services and community resources; local government efforts to reduce domestic and family violence; public awareness and public education necessary to state and local laws; and the need for services for those who are victims of domestic and family violence.

DISCUSSION:

The Domestic Violence Council (DVC) includes Categorical Members-those who serve by virtue of their public or other specifically designated office-and Appointed Members-those who are appointed by or confirmed by the Board. Some Appointed Members are individuals who represent specific entities, such as the Police Chiefs and Sheriff Association or the Council of Cities, and who are designated by those entities to serve on the DVC and then confirmed by the Board. Other Appointed Members are individuals who represent specific types of entities, such as agencies providing treatment services to batterers or non-profit agencies serving battered women. There are four Appointed Member who represent the Community-at-large.

Historically, the Appointed Members who represent specific types of entities have represented the same set of agencies: Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA); the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County; and Bay Area Legal Aid. Over the past several years, individuals representing those agencies have left the DVC and have been replaced by new individuals from those same agencies, without going through the formal Board appointment process. The retroactive appointments requested in this memorandum for Nicole Reyes, Stephanie Bilinski, and Karen Ferguson seek to formalize their appointments representing those agencies.

Nicole Reyes, Esq., has been with Bay Area Legal Aid as a staff attorney for several years. She has served on the Domestic Violence Council (DVC) since 2019. Nicole is the new Chair of the Domestic Violence Awareness Committee and brings experience in anti-violence work, and a deep expertise in domestic violence advocacy and policy change.

Stephanie Bilinski, Pro Bono Director for The Legal Aid Society, has extensive experience with family law with a focus on child custody and child welfare issues and divorce mediation. She took over representation for Legal Aid on the Domestic Violence Council in 2020 when attorney Jenny Horne stepped down.

Karen Ferguson, PhD, is the new Executive Director with CORA, formerly held by Colsaria Henderson, and as such takes over representation for CORA on the Domestic Violence Council. She brings decades of experience to this role. Prior to joining CORA, since 2015 she has been the Executive Director of the Northern California offices of IRC, the International Rescue Committee, providing comprehensive services for newly arriving refugees. Prior to her work with IRC, Dr. Ferguson designed and developed the full range of refugee resettlement services in Alaska including co-authoring the federal proposal that launched the programming. She then served as the State Refugee Coordinator and Resettlement Director in Alaska for over 10 years, directing assistance and resettlement services for refugees, immigrants, and victims of trafficking.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.