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March 30, 2020

Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Kamala Harris
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Feinstein and Harris,

My colleagues and I write today to request emergency aid to provide temporary housing and services to survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse, child abuse, and sexual assault in California. While the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic has been felt across the state, it has fallen particularly hard on those who lack access to a safe home or a stable support network. These impacts are even more acute for undocumented Californians who are often employed in the types of industries most impacted by social distancing requirements and shelter-in-place orders. When the loss of stable employment is combined with the lack of a safe home or family situation, the potential for tragedy grows exponentially.

As the co-founder of the Central Contra Costa Family Justice Center, a multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary center that serves survivors of interpersonal violence, I have seen firsthand how an unsafe home can be the catalyst for a steep decline in social, emotional, physical, and economic health. During an economic downturn and amidst the isolation required by shelter-in-place orders, survivors are forced to make dangerous choices in order to keep a roof over their heads. In the weeks since the beginning of the pandemic, many of us have heard heartbreaking reports from service providers in our district, including accounts of survivors having to choose between sleeping on the street or going home to an abuser, or having to ask someone who victimized them for financial support so that their children don't go without a meal. This issue is even more pronounced for undocumented Californians who are unable to access Federally-funded public benefit programs like SNAP, TANF, and health care subsidies under the ACA.

The populations served by organizations like the Family Justice Center are among the most vulnerable in California. The majority of survivors utilizing their services are in high-risk situations, and many have suffered near-fatal assaults at the hands of their abusers. In Contra Costa County, 18% of these individuals lack legal immigration status, 19% are without medical insurance, and 63% earn less than \$2,000 per month. The sad truth is that domestic violence shelters have already seen an increase in calls for service since the imposition of the statewide shelter-in-place order, and they are struggling to meet the demand with their limited resources. In order to support the critical work of organizations that serve this



vulnerable population, my colleagues and I request that the following priorities be included in any future COVID-19 response legislation:

- **Provide additional funding for organizations that serve survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse, child abuse, and sexual assault.** Legislation should include augmentations for the Family Violence prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), including, but not limited to, funding for the Sexual Assault Service Program, the STOP Formula Grant Program, transitional housing, rural, and legal assistance programs, culturally specific programs, and outreach to underserved community grant programs.
- **Funding should be granted with maximum flexibility to allow organizations to address the unique and rapidly changing needs of their communities.** This includes, but is not limited to, paying support staff for work missed due to COVID-19 impacts, rental assistance, crisis counseling, nutritional assistance, and legal aid. In addition, the matching fund requirement for VAWA and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds should be waived to allow support organizations to access funding despite reductions in revenue.
- **Funding should address a broad range of supportive services for survivors,** including funding for multidisciplinary centers, assisting with urgent housing needs, ensuring timely and safe access to the courts, and addressing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic by bolstering safety net and employment protection programs. Funding should be specifically earmarked for organizations that serve survivors of interpersonal violence to ensure it is not diverted to other uses.

The social and economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been tremendous - but for most of us it has been in the context of a safe home, a loving family, and a robust social safety net. I urge you to continue to think of the impact on the most vulnerable Californians, for whom a missed paycheck may mean a terrible choice between living on the street or living with an abuser. My colleagues and I request that Senate Democrats include emergency funding to provide a broad range of services for victims of interpersonal violence in any future COVID-19 response legislation. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that this funding will directly benefit the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,



Timothy S. Grayson
Assemblymember, 14th District



Susan Rubio
Senator, 22nd District



Rebecca Bauer-Kahan,
Assemblymember, 16th District



Jim Frazier,
Assemblymember, 11th District



Laura Friedman,
Assemblymember, 43rd District



Scott Wiener,
Senator, 11th District



Buffy Wicks,
Assemblymember, 15th District



Phil Ting
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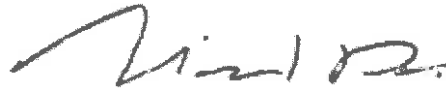
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