

## **SUBJECT**

### **UPDATE/DISCUSSION - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19**

## **EXPECTED ATTENDEES**

Debbie Feinstein  
Chief, Special Victims Division, State's Attorney's Office  
Chair, Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Health and Human Services (HHS)

## **COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

- Council sitting as Board of Health to receive updates.

## **DESCRIPTION/ISSUE**

The Council will receive an update on the County's new family violence awareness and prevention campaign, which was launched on April 23, 2020. Multiple county agencies collaborated on this campaign, including the Office of the County Executive, the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, and the Montgomery County Commission for Women.

The goal of this initiative is to raise public awareness around the identification and incidence of family violence; to provide information to individuals who may be experiencing family violence while social distancing and staying at home; to guide individuals on how to support a friend or family member who is experiencing family violence; and to identify available community resources.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS**

• The Board of Health is continuing its regular briefings on the status of cases in Montgomery County and ongoing coordination and collaboration with federal, State, and local agencies and healthcare providers. This item provides information on domestic violence and prevention initiatives that are particularly important during COVID-related social distancing and stay-at-home orders.

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To: Montgomery County Council Members

From: Debbie Feinstein  
Chief, Special Victims Division, State's Attorney's Office  
Chair, Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Re: Protecting Victims of Family Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Date: April 28, 2020

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On April 23, 2020, Montgomery County launched a family violence awareness and prevention campaign. Multiple county agencies collaborated on this campaign, including the Office of the County Executive, the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, and the Montgomery County Commission for Women.

**Objective:** To raise public awareness around the identification and incidence of family violence; to provide information to individuals who may be experiencing family violence while social distancing and staying at home; to guide individuals on how to support a friend or family member who is experiencing family violence; and to identify available community resources.

**Slogan:** "Do You Feel Unsafe at Home? Are you concerned about a neighbor or loved one? Free Help Is Available." (printed in English/Spanish and available in other languages).

## SUMMARY

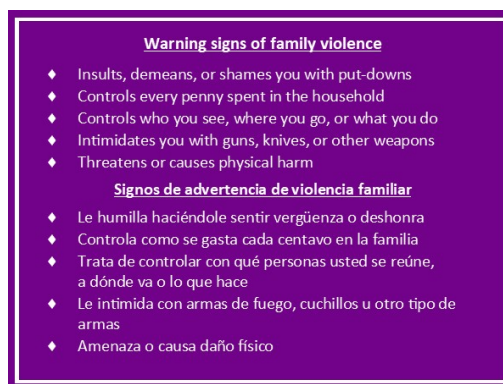
The public health crisis surrounding COVID-19 has magnified the dangers that victims of family violence face every day. Victims are often isolated, manipulated, and controlled by their abuser. They may be intimate partners, children, seniors, or vulnerable people and unable to seek help on their own. Their isolation often cuts them off from potential support systems, which is why it is so difficult for them to come forward and seek help even in normal times.

There are natural stressors that come with times of fear and uncertainty, and the COVID-19 public health crisis in particular is triggering financial and occupational concerns in many homes. This, in combination with self-quarantine and social distancing, puts family violence victims in an incredibly volatile and dangerous situation, with limited access to any support system.

County resources remain free, open, available and ready to assist in any language. County service providers do not inquire about immigration status. County service providers are taking every precaution to maintain safe, healthy, and socially distanced environments for those that seek services. The courts are open for those that need to seek protective, peace, and extreme risk protective orders.

## MATERIALS FOR DISTRIBUTION

**Stickers/cards for distribution:** The stickers can be used on plexiglass at open stores and the cards can be distributed with food pick-ups/deliveries.



**Posters or yard signs:** Posters or yard signs can be displayed in or in front of businesses.

**Graphics and language for social media:** Graphics for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were created for social media posts. In addition, the County has purchased targeted advertisements on Facebook and Twitter.



**FJC Website:** The FJC website has been updated with resources lists and fact sheet and includes information about intimate partner violence, elder abuse and child abuse. The FJC also created an informational video (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/fjc/>).

**Ride-On Bus Posters:** Posters will be displayed on 65 Ride-On buses (moving billboards).

## OUTCOMES

**Card and sticker distribution:** To date, 12,500 cards and stickers have been distributed to businesses/organizations including Montgomery County Liquor and Wine Stores, Founding Farmers, Giuseppi's Pizza, Manna Food Center, and the Montgomery County Police Department (in addition, Montgomery County Liquor Stores are printing resource information on their receipts).

**Media coverage:** Includes The Washington Post, NBC4, and WTOP.

**Social media (approx. # as of 4/28/20):** Twitter impressions 64,000; 4/23/20 press conference viewed 4,000 times; FJC video viewed 400 times, County Executive video viewed 2,500 times.

## AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- The Family Justice Center (FJC) and its network of advocates and service providers is available FREE OF CHARGE Monday-Friday, 8:30am - 5:00pm. Call them at 240-773-0444, walk-in to 600 Jefferson Plaza, Suite 500, Rockville, MD 20852, or email [safe@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:safe@montgomerycountymd.gov) for assistance (email checked during business hours). Free transportation to/from the Center may be available if needed.
- The advocates and therapists at the Abused Persons Program are available FREE OF CHARGE during regular business hours at 240-777-4195.
- For 24-hour assistance:
  - Call the Montgomery County Crisis Center at 240-777-4000 or walk-in 24/7 to 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville, MD 20850.
  - Go to the District Court Commissioners Office to file for a Protective Order at 191 E. Jefferson Street, Rockville, MD 20850.
- Montgomery County Child Welfare Services is staffed 24 hours a day at 240-777-4417 or [childprotection@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:childprotection@montgomerycountymd.gov) (email is checked during business hours).
- Childhelp USA has a 24-hour hotline to report suspected child abuse. People can either call or text (800) 4-A-CHILD ([800] 422-4453 for help. Childhelp also has a chat feature allows abuse to be reported online: <http://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline>
- Adult Protective Services is staffed 24 hours a day at 240-777-3000.
- The Tree House Child Advocacy Center provides services for child abuse victims at 240-777-4699 and [www.treehousemd.org](http://www.treehousemd.org).
- The Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program (VASAP) is available at 240-777-1355 and [vasap@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:vasap@montgomerycountymd.gov).
- For specialized medical care, including domestic violence, sexual assault exams and child abuse, please contact Adventist Healthcare Shady Grove Medical Center at 240-826-6225.
- As always, those in immediate danger who need emergency assistance should dial 911.

To request posters, stickers, yard signs or cards, or for any questions, please contact Smita Varia, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council Program Manager at [Smita.Varia@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Smita.Varia@montgomerycountymd.gov).