More Survivors Than Ever Are Reaching Out to The Hotline

Since February, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) has experienced the highest contact volume of its 26-year history. We believed that once life returned to any kind of normalcy, there would be more survivors needing support who had not felt safe to reach out during the height of the pandemic. In fact, our contact volume began increasing notably last October.

One significant factor in the dramatic increase since February is Google’s launch of a crisis search tool to get critical, vetted information to users in need quickly. Google launched, or will launch, boxes for four crisis causes: domestic violence, sexual assault, suicide, and substance abuse. The Hotline was the second box to go live. You can read more about this effort at this link.

Our contact volume nearly doubled overnight — a powerful and somber illustration of how many people are impacted by relationship abuse and need access to 24/7 support. The Hotline has been scaling our workforce and technology to meet the need, but we must do more. The increased call volume is significantly impacting the wait times for those who need the support of a Hotline advocate. We know that many of those who are reaching out have only small windows of time in which it is safe to call, chat, or text. The reality is that too many are unable to wait.

Hiring and training a record number of new advocates is critical. For the first time, we are expanding our workforce beyond our Austin, TX headquarters. We opened a hub in Las Vegas, NV in September and onboarded nearly 20 new advocates. We have plans to open two additional hubs in the future. Along with expanding our advocate talent pool, a more distributed workforce will protect The Hotline’s operational capacity in the event of natural disasters, like the extreme winter storm that severely impacted Austin in February 2021, or the recent Hurricane Ian that devastated parts of Florida and surrounding geography.

Technological enhancements will also be key to developing the capacity to meet demand. We have plans to implement new technology solutions to decrease wait times. We will build additional pathways to lifesaving information for those who do not feel safe enough reach out to a live advocate or who cannot wait if one is not immediately available.

“You have given me such clarity and hope and tools to make the best decision for myself. I just wanted to let you know that you’re doing a really great job...”
— a Hotline contact

The Hotline has undertaken a comprehensive plan to meet this growing need. However, successfully implementing it will require additional financial resources. We have launched a $2 million fundraising campaign called Hope Can’t Wait to help us provide 50,000 more survivors with the hope they need to create a new life.

We have $1,125,000 left to reach our goal. Will you help us meet this critical moment for survivors by investing in The Hotline?

Please contact Chief Development Officer, Brett Barnes, at campaign@thehotline.org if you would like to support the campaign.

Law Enforcement Experience

The Hotline conducted a survey on the experiences survivors impacted by intimate partner violence or sexual assault have had with members of law enforcement. Released in October 2022, you can now read the results of our survey here.
Announcing Project Opal

In July 2021, members from The Hotline and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) leadership met to explore how our two organizations could work together to further our missions — expanding support for victims, survivors, and those who provide services to them. Over the last year, our leadership teams and respective Boards explored the possibilities of what joining forces would mean. Together, while exploring with external legal and organizational experts, we quickly realized we could do something bold, transformational, and trail-blazing.

In August 2022, both Boards unanimously voted to join together through a venture named Project Opal. The response to domestic violence has long been overburdened and under-resourced. We believe it takes a comprehensive multi-layered national, regional, and local approach to fully support survivors — to further their survival, safety, and recovery.

This approach includes providing national 24/7 resources dedicated to serving those affected by intimate partner violence, such as those provided by The Hotline. It also includes organizations, such as NCADV, who are dedicated to policy change and ensuring the education and wellness of those on the front lines doing this critical work.

Our goal is to reimagine our two organizations to create systems change in the national response to domestic violence. By combining federal policy efforts to promote policies and legislation that best serves and protects victims and survivors of domestic violence; and providing advanced training opportunities, resources, and programming that reflect the complex needs of victims and survivors so they can be better supported and served. We can grow our missions, reach more survivors, maximize resources, and leverage the talent of our two phenomenal teams.

Policy Update

Efforts to end domestic violence have established important protections for individuals experiencing abuse, but a lot of work remains to close the gap between survivors’ needs for immediate safety and their access to those resources and support. The Hotline’s Policy team intends to bridge these gaps through policy advocacy and issue education.

A key piece of legislation that supports survivors around the country is the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA). FVPSA is the primary federal funding source dedicated to supporting emergency shelter, related assistance for survivors of domestic violence and their children, and The Hotline. FVPSA was last reauthorized in 2010 and the U.S. House of Representatives passed a reauthorization bill last October 2021. The U.S. Senate committee of jurisdiction passed a reauthorization last July, and our advocacy has centered around ensuring final passage of the bill. Use our FVPSA toolkit to tell your Senator about the critical bill and share with your networks!

In May, our CEO, Katie Ray-Jones, testified before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies to share the urgent need for funding for both The Hotline and domestic violence programs across the country. Unfortunately, Congress has not finalized their FY23 budget, but we are optimistic that Congress will continue thoughtful investment in the programs that serve survivors.

In September, The Hotline’s Board of Directors took to Capitol Hill for in-person visits to share the current state of The Hotline, advocate for funding, and advance swift passage of FVPSA reauthorization. Hill staff were very excited to meet our Board Members and learn about our work!

- Learn more about our policy agenda.
- You can download our FVPSA toolkit here.

P.S. You can always support The Hotline in our advocacy to shift power back to survivors by signing up for our Action Center to stay up-to-date with our latest opportunities for engagement. Each voice can make a difference, and we appreciate your support!
Finding Shelter Availability in Texas

The most common need for survivors contacting The Hotline in 2022 has been shelter space. So far this year, nearly 50,000 contacts have asked our advocates for assistance finding a shelter. Unfortunately, available shelter space in the United States is very hard to find. It is common for our advocates to have to contact more than 6-10 shelters or search hundreds of miles from the desired service location, before they find one with availability. This is time-consuming and is all happening while the survivor is on hold.

We decided a new approach was needed, so we set out to build a new system where shelters could update their availability in real-time. This new system would give our advocates better data to decide which shelter to reach out to, minimizing the time survivors are waiting on hold and reducing the stress on Hotline advocates. In our research on how to address this ongoing challenge, we identified DVBEDS.org as an already existing system that might work for our needs. The Family Place in Dallas, TX and Global Emergency Response, Inc. from Georgia had teamed up to build the system with the goal of using it across Texas. We decided to join forces for our pilot project.

Now we have nearly 30 shelters across Texas who are actively using the system and updating their availability at least once a day. In our Provider Directory, our advocates can now see the number of beds each participating shelter has available, if any, and the date and time the information was last updated. This helps them prioritize who to contact first based on their likelihood to have a bed available.

Unfortunately, because of the overwhelming demand for shelter services, availability is still hard to find throughout the country. DVBEDS.org is not able to address the simple lack of shelter space to meet the needs of survivors. Having this data, however, allows us to highlight the fact that nearly every shelter in Texas is full every day.

As our pilot ends, we are exploring ways to continue to support and grow DVBEDS.org. We are exploring partnerships with other regional groups who are working on similar systems. We hope a funding source will be identified to take the service nationwide. Until then, we will continue to leverage the site and its data to assist survivors in Texas.

An Interview with Shift Support Specialist Melissa Dolak-Keller

Q. Why do you do this work?
A. I believe in doing my part (no matter how small) to help someone through something that is bigger than all of us. As a survivor of sexual assault who had some support, I still dealt with a lot alone — I wanted to help others who may not have as much support. In 2005 I started volunteering with a local rape crisis center in New Jersey. Doing that work, while intense, was eye-opening, and I knew it was something I wanted to continue. Once I realized that it was something I could do, I felt it was something I needed to do because not everyone can (and that’s ok!).

Q. What is the hardest part of the job?
A. The hardest part is knowing that there can be many barriers outside an abusive relationship that often make it more difficult for survivors to leave or remain independent after leaving. It takes so much strength to decide to leave and do it safely. We provide as much emotional support, information, and resource referrals as we can, but it’s tough not knowing if they will be successful in getting a protective order, or finding permanent housing or employment, or how the court might rule in their custody case, for example.

Q. Most rewarding part of the job?
A. Being able to provide a space for someone’s voice and story to be heard. The isolation someone feels in an abusive relationship can be suffocating, so just being listened to, and supported without judgement can mean a lot for someone who may not have anyone else they can turn to. That is why I truly love coming to work every day.

Q. What is something you want people who support The Hotline to know?
A. When people reach out to us they are often feeling hopeless and trapped. Being heard and taken seriously are two of the most vital things we can offer. So many survivors I’ve talked to express feeling better after having a chance to chat even if we can’t “fix” what is going on in their relationship. At the very least, they have tools to stay safer, places they can reach out to for further help in their area, feel a little stronger, and have hope, which is incredibly powerful. Every little bit of support allows us to continue to provide these services every day and night and give someone even a small ray of light in a situation where they may have only seen darkness.
Multi-city release of The Hotline’s new short film – The Call

Presented by The Allstate Foundation

The victimization of survivors and the abuse they experience is often used to sensationalize the issue of domestic violence. To change the narrative and put the focus on the bravery, resilience, and strength of survivors, The Hotline recently created a short film, *The Call*.

We hope this film will help shift the national discourse of domestic violence, especially in media and entertainment. Heather Jernigan, Executive Producer at Castleview Productions commented: “The Hotline does incredible work helping survivors regain their lives by providing tools needed to nurture their strength. We’re privileged to have produced, directed, and edited this short film which we hope will continue changing the narrative around domestic violence by supporting survivors and the projects to help them thrive.”

After premiering it at our 25th Anniversary commemoration event in Washington, D.C. in September, we are excited to bring this film to audiences across the country in person and online. We are planning events in Austin, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City. The program will also include animated videos created by Hello Sunshine, The Allstate Foundation, and Vox, and a moderated panel discussion. At least one of these events will be livestreamed. We hope you can join us!

Visit [www.thehotline.org/thecall](http://www.thehotline.org/thecall) for more details.

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**Ways to Give**

Your donation puts every survivor who reaches out to The Hotline on a path toward a safer future.

Make your gift online at [thehotline.org/2022FallNewsletter](http://thehotline.org/2022FallNewsletter) or by scanning this QR code.

Checks can be sent to:
National Domestic Violence Hotline
P.O. Box 90249, Austin, TX 78709

Call to give at **(737) 234-6464**

There can be advantages to donating through:
- Donor-Advised Funds
- Stock or Mutual Funds
- Mandatory IRA Distributions
- Estate or Planned Gifts

Vehicle donations (car, truck, motorcycle, RV, or boat) are possible through CARS at [bit.ly/TheHotline-CARS](https://bit.ly/TheHotline-CARS) (link is case sensitive).

If you would like more information, please contact Donor Relations at [development@thehotline.org](mailto:development@thehotline.org).

Thank you for your generosity!

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**FOLLOW US:**

[thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

[loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

If you or someone you know is affected by relationship abuse, 24/7 support is available.

**Call:** 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

**Chat:** [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

**Text:** “START” to 88788

National Domestic Violence Hotline | P.O. Box 90249 | Austin, TX 78709