



## **SURVIVORS AND ADVOCATES FOR EMPOWERMENT**

Supporting and Empowering Domestic Violence Survivors since 1997  
Apoyando a Víctimas de Violencia Doméstica desde 1997

### **Testimony of Survivors and Advocates for Empowerment, Inc. (DC SAFE)**

#### **Budget Oversight Hearing - Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs**

#### **Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs - April 25, 2024**

Thank you, Chairperson White and esteemed members of the Committee. I am Sirena Clark, the Supportive Advocacy Team Manager at DC SAFE. Since joining in 2022 as a bilingual Advocate, I have witnessed the impact of our organization in the community.

DC SAFE is the only crisis intervention agency for domestic violence in Washington, DC, operating our 24/7 Crisis Response Line. Last year alone, we supported a record number of 12,328 District residents, with 255 clients identifying as Latino. The majority of our clients access DC SAFE services through our Response Line, which received over 42,000 calls total last fiscal year.

Today I am eager to raise our perspective on the impact of the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget for the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs or MOLA and the overall impact for Latino survivors in the District. Since 2009, DC SAFE has received funding from the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs. In fact, our very first grant with the office led to the creation of our ACCIÓN line, a dedicated aspect of our Response Line specifically for Spanish-speakers. In the past year, the ACCIÓN line received between 6 to 25 calls monthly, underscoring its important role as an access point to the Spanish speaking community.

While MOLA funding absolutely supports our work with Latino survivors, it must be noted that it is only marginal in terms of the scope of our impact. For the past five years, DC SAFE has only received \$20,000 from MOLA, which is less than one percent of our total organizational budget. DC SAFE estimates that our current cost per client is between \$300-500. Therefore, with \$20,000 in support, MOLA is technically only supporting around 50 Latino clients per year through our services, which is just around 20% of our total Latino clients. While DC SAFE does receive ample support from other District agencies, it is important to note that our MOLA grant



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is the only dedicated funding source we have that specifically supports our work with Latino clients.

In addition to providing direct services for Latino clients, we also conduct outreach to further partnerships and build trust in the Latino community. Our Executive Director, Natalia Otero, regularly stewards relationships with La Clínica del Pueblo, Ayuda, Mary's Center, and The Family Place. Of course, collaborations with these organizations provide invaluable insights into the needs of Latino clients and also expand our reach. Increased funding from MOLA would help support these endeavors.

That said, we would like to see the District's investment in our dedicated efforts with the Latino community be commensurate with our level of impact. Every year, we ask for the maximum award amount of \$50,000 through the MOLA Community Grant program; however, for the past several years, we have been flat funded at just \$20,000 -- despite major upticks we've seen in Latinos seeking support over the past two years, especially amidst the migrant crisis. As such, we are very pleased to see that Mayor Bowser's proposed budget includes an increase of about \$1M to MOLA's Agency Management program, which is primarily used to support subsidies for community-based grants.

This type of increase is actually fairly striking as we've reviewed other aspects of the FY25 proposed budget for the city, which includes over \$30M in cuts to family homeless services and major decreases in social safety nets like SNAP benefits and childcare subsidies. We felt it important to note today that while we commend the Mayor for a clear prioritization of Latino residents in the District through the increase to MOLA, other cuts will inevitably harm the population. And in reality, the increase in funding to MOLA is not enough to band aid those gaps.

Ultimately, we urge the committee and the Council as a whole to protect, if not add to, the budget increase proposed for MOLA, and also consider how to, at a minimum, replenish and



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more ideally bolster other social supports that Latino survivors and families rely on. We all exist in a complicated system where all parts of the whole affect one another. And it's critical that the Council utilizes this type of systems thinking as it makes adjustments to the budget that hopefully improve the overall wellbeing of Latino survivors in DC.

Thank you for your time and consideration.