

2021-2023
**LEGISLATIVE
AGENDA**



End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin:

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

www.endabusewi.org

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1978, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (**End Abuse**) is the statewide voice for **victims of domestic violence**. We provide technical assistance to domestic violence volunteers and advocates, law enforcement, legislators, and community members to provide safety and support to survivors. We partner with communities to shift Wisconsin from the attitudes and beliefs that cause domestic violence to values of mutual respect and equity. By doing so, **we strive to prevent and end domestic abuse for future generations**.

“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power interlocks and intersects; for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.

We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status.

What is often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.”

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Domestic violence (DV) is a public health crisis that impacts all Wisconsinites, and which is impacted by all other forms of violence and oppression.

2020 brought unparalleled challenges for DV programs, survivors, and communities across WI. As we grapple with the impacts of COVID-19 on our lives and the economy, a racial justice reckoning 400 years in the making, and urgent issues of climate justice, the challenges that our most marginalized community members face – as well as the inter-connectivity amongst historically siloed issues – has become clearer to more people than ever before.

While they remain important efforts to protect our communities from the virus, Safer at Home mandates and social distancing practices sparked an increase in DV incidents across WI. Increased stress from economic insecurity means survivors find themselves in more volatile environments with abusive partners, and forced isolation prevents usual systems of connection and support. Referred to as a “shadow pandemic” by international media and human rights organizations, DV during the COVID-19 pandemic has required increased awareness and an urgent response.

OUR APPROACH TO PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

This two-year agenda is **informed by our Homicide Report, Housing Research Project, Family Law Study, 'Moment of Truth' Statement, and the feedback we received from advocates across WI**, including responses to our annual survey and ongoing meetings held to further discuss housing and homelessness, economic justice, the criminal legal system, prevention, transformative justice, racial equity, and dismantling white supremacy. We incorporated feedback from survivors of violence who graciously shared their experiences with us.

In determining which legislative efforts to support or oppose during the legislative session, we consult with DV programs, survivors of DV, coordinated community response teams, and other community members impacted by and working to address DV.

We are guided by these questions:

- Will this meet the needs of the last survivor?
- What effect will this have on the prevalence and severity of intimate partner violence?
- What are the consequences of implementation?
- Does this uphold or work to dismantle white supremacy culture?
- Does this address the harm/work to prevent harm from happening again?
- Is this accountability or punishment?

Our answers adopt an intersectional approach to address the needs of the most marginalized community member, the **Last Survivor**. Centering the realities and needs of the most marginalized survivors enables us to reach all survivors of violence and create an effective, sustainable movement toward ending DV and other forms of oppression. As stated by lawyer, civil rights advocate, and leading critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw:

“Placing those most marginalized in the center is the most effective way to resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences and undermine collective action.”

Our goal of a world without violence will take collective effort. At End Abuse, we know that **all systems of oppression are inextricably linked**, and we will not achieve a world without violence until we are all free.

We must collaborate with, elevate the work of, and learn from those leading movement for: Black Liberation and BIPOC-centered gender justice; anti-capitalist labor rights and anti-poverty programs; humane immigration policies, decolonizing land practices and Indigenous sovereignty; disability rights; and environmental justice.

The information contained within this document is by no means comprehensive - it merely **highlights some of the issues we prioritize as a coalition and represents the diverse needs and interests of survivors and their families**. We encourage legislators, local DV programs, survivors, and others to contact us with potential legislative initiatives throughout the 2021-2023 session.

We welcome all who seek transformative change and look forward to building solidarity to enact meaningful transformative policy.

A better world is within reach.

“The reality is that, although we all suffer oppression in capitalist society, **our oppression assumes different forms.**

Not always immediately visible, **the links between these forms of oppression must be revealed...through conscious efforts to build solidarity.**

Only in this way, by struggling in and through our diversity, can we achieve the combined power we need if we hope to transform society.”

Feminism for the 99%

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Domestic violence is an economic problem.

The uptick in intimate partner violence during economic recessions is not a coincidence.

Macroeconomic policies profoundly affect workers – particularly low-income workers – and those policies can create and reinforce the conditions in which intimate partner violence flourishes.

As low-waged, precarious service work replaces unionized labor, wages fall below the bare minimum necessary to live a decent life. Workers are forced to take on multiple and precarious jobs without any form of employment security or meaningful benefits, including pensions, health insurance, parental benefits, or protection against wrongful termination

When poor women lose their jobs, there are few government services or supports available to help them meet their basic economic needs, leaving them more vulnerable to violence and then trapping them within violent relationships as a result of economic dependence.

This is not to say that intimate partner violence is isolated to low-income areas or that it does not affect wealthier individuals. It does, however, impact the severity of the violence and access to resources.

The relationship between community income levels and intimate partner violence is not a function of who lives in low-income neighborhoods or the individual characteristics of community members. The relationship is instead a result of the neighborhood context – living in a low-income neighborhood in and of itself increases the risk of intimate partner violence.

Survivors are hit particularly hard by capitalism, which devalues the lives of working-class people and the collective liberation of all people.

Male unemployment is also strongly correlated with – is, in fact, the ‘most important demographic risk factor’ for – intimate partner violence. Moreover, suicide and homicide rates increase among the unemployed. This is a deadly combination for survivors and their children.

“[Gender violence] is grounded in the basic institutional structure of capitalist society.”

Feminism for the 99%

PRIORITIES

Center the needs and voices of low-income women of color in policy decision-making.

Implement a Universal Basic Income (UBI) - An unconditional, regular cash payment for all. By giving everyone financial independence, UBI would ensure survivors are not dependent on abusive partners to meet their basic needs and would remove a significant barrier to leaving. Survivors are the experts in their own lives. Enabling survivors to independently rebuild their lives should be at the core of domestic violence policy. UBI could help survivors escape with guaranteed income that would facilitate access to safety and stability. Un-secure work and unemployment are potent challenges for LGBTQIA2S+ people, particularly for trans folks. UBI would support those who are chronically underrepresented or discriminated against in the workplace and who experience low levels of employment. UBI would also support those who cause harm and may help mitigate the effect of unemployment as a demographic risk factor for intimate partner violence.

Support workers' rights by championing efforts to preserve job security, increase the minimum wage, expand public benefits, and make healthcare access affordable to all.

Fund employment programs and eliminate benefit eligibility restrictions like work requirements, drug testing, & employment training for struggling families.

If we want our communities to be safer, then we need to fund them. Communities that thrive are those that are well-resourced. We demand investment in our communities so that everyone can thrive.

“Because capitalism assigns reproductive work overwhelmingly to women, it restricts our ability to participate fully, as peers, in the world of ‘productive work,’...most of us land...jobs that don’t pay enough to support a family. That rebounds on “private life” to our disadvantage, as our lesser ability to exit relationships disempowers us within them.”

Feminism for the 99%

HOUSING

Domestic violence and housing insecurity are inextricably linked.

The need for safe, immediate, and affordable housing is a significant challenge for survivors of domestic violence and the service providers who work with them. Housing insecurity is a primary reason why survivors stay in abusive relationships and why children continue to be exposed to violence.

More than 50% of homeless women have reported that DV was the cause of their homelessness. Although this problem is nationwide, surveys have shown it is especially acute in WI; on a single day in 2020, 88% of unmet requests for DV services in WI were for housing.

As Wisconsinites stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we are reminded that **“safe at home” is not safe for everyone.** As isolation increases, so does the risk of domestic violence.

Additionally, we know that ‘the 2008 crash of the mortgage market **disproportionately impacted women of color, who suffered the highest rates of eviction** and were more likely to choose between homelessness and remaining in abusive relationships.’

"At any given time, half of those staying in our shelter are children"

-WIDV Advocate



PRIORITIES

Provide safe housing for everyone.

Housing is a human right. We support efforts to increase affordable, quality housing, particularly for adult and youth survivors of violence, and in disenfranchised communities.

Advocate for Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Policies - DVHF is a model designed to end homelessness by providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness without setting up prerequisites to the receipt of that assistance. One of the keys to the success of this model, specifically when it is applied to survivors of DV, is the flexibility of the funding. Survivors know their immediate needs best, and advocates assisting those survivors within a DV Housing First model need to be able to address time-sensitive needs articulated by an individual survivor, be that rent assistance, utility costs, lock change fees, or bus passes. In conjunction with policy and advocacy experts at the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the state of WA has pioneered the implementation of DV Housing First with survivors, through stages of development, implementation, and evaluation. In WI, the model has proven successful in a privately funded pilot conducted by Golden House Domestic Abuse Program and Shelter in Green Bay. Building on expertise found at Golden House and WSCADV, we advocate that WI fund a series of DV Housing First pilot programs in diverse counties and tribal communities. Such pilot studies would provide specific data needed for elected officials to consider a statewide commitment to DV Housing First.

Expand Lease Termination Rights - Lease termination rights allow survivors of violence to end their tenancy if they believe that they face an imminent threat of danger. Under the current Safe Housing Act, survivors are unable to terminate a lease without engaging civil or criminal legal systems. Unfortunately, research indicates that survivors who seek protection from legal systems unsuccessfully may experience escalated danger as their abusive partners are emboldened by a lack of accountability. Expanding the requirements of proof to include a letter from a victim advocate supports those survivors who may not feel safe or able to engage with legal systems.

Fund Dedicated Housing Navigation Staff - Domestic violence services should be funded for staff dedicated specifically to housing navigation. Housing navigators would identify affordable housing opportunities for clients, act as liaison between potential tenants and landlords, and mediate any issues that might arise between parties. In alignment with advocacy recommendations from the Moment of Truth, redirecting funds from law enforcement to resource housing staff at DV/SA organizations would support community safety and stability.



HOMICIDE PREVENTION

Data from our 2019 Homicide Report indicates three key findings:

First, that leaving does not necessarily lead to safety: Between 2000–2019, 811 victims of DV homicide were recorded in communities across Wisconsin. **In 57% of the homicide incidents, prior DV was a precipitating factor.** In at least 42% of cases, a victim leaving a relationship preceded the homicide.

Second, that firearms are the leading tool in DV homicides in WI: Since 2005, **firearms have killed more people in DV homicides in WI than all other methods of killing combined.** Between 2000–2019, firearms were used in over half (52%) of all DV homicides in WI. In 2019 alone, **firearms were used in over half (55%) of all DV homicide incidents in WI.**

And third, that DV homicide victims are most often killed by current partners in their homes: In 2019, **most (82%) of DV homicides took place in the victim's or perpetrator's home.** Between 2000–2019, the highest % (43%) of DV homicides in WI were committed by current partners of victims.

Further, recent high-profile killings of Black people at the hands of law enforcement across the nation have underscored how homicide prevention efforts primarily focused on law enforcement response further propagate the white supremacist systemic violence we aim to end.

PRIORITIES

Establish Local Homicide Review

Teams - No victim in WI should have to take the courageous step of leaving an abusive relationship without the safety and support offered by DV victim advocates, and without the benefit of a coordinated community response. We encourage legislative efforts to strengthen community responses to DV by establishing a process by which local communities can undertake systematic homicide reviews in the wake of DV- related deaths. Such reviews seek to understand rather than blame; to improve systems rather than punish and to address root causes and transform conditions that allowed the harm to occur in the first place.

Implement universal background checks on gun sales

- States with universal background checks have shown to have nearly 40% fewer women shot and killed annually.

Reinstate the 48-hour waiting period on firearm purchases.

Prohibit misdemeanor DV offenders from possessing weapons.

Broaden the list of community partners we equip to implement homicide prevention programming -

In conjunction with local community based DV programs, widening the range of service providers who are knowledgeable about lethality risk factors and have established relationships with DV advocates will improve survivor access to individualized crisis intervention and long-term support. Expanding partners outside of law enforcement ensures collaborative efforts center the Last Survivor, as we know that those most marginalized do not turn to law enforcement for intervention and support due to safety concerns.

Redistribute resources from law enforcement and carceral systems -

Shifting funds toward community-based transformative justice programming, mutual aid networks, and primary prevention initiatives will promote safer, healthier, and more just communities across our state.

FAMILY LAW SYSTEM

The Family Law system is chronically overburdened and is neither trauma-informed nor victim-centered.

These compounding characteristics minimize the nuances of complex cases and encourage judges, commissioners, Guardians ad Litem (GALs), and others to ignore the signs of DV, leading to **dangerous outcomes for survivors and their children.**



The Family Law System does not consistently account for DV when making child custody & placement decisions.

Even when a child has witnessed violent abuse, sole placement with the victim is rarely ordered, & joint custody is the most common order.

Safety provisions that ensure the protection of the survivor and their children are **rarely ordered**, even in cases with a criminal history of DV.

Many judges are unaware of the history of DV when making their decisions, or they do not believe it should affect custody and placement.

Guardians ad Litem, appointed to determine the best interest of the child, are **not systematically accounting for DV.**

In cases with a **history of criminal domestic violence, DV is rarely mentioned** & DV findings are rarely made by the Court.

The court process is cumbersome & challenging for unrepresented litigants, which includes more than 50% of the survivors who go through family court.

PRIORITIES

Encourage frequent, quality training To make informed, equitable decisions that center survivors and their children, education is necessary for GALs, judicial officials, and other court personnel on anti-oppression in the context of domestic and sexual violence, culturally-specific DV dynamics, impacts of childhood exposure to DV, and the short and long-term effects of trauma.

Increase funding for GAL compensation to lessen the financial burden on families.

Implement effective accountability mechanisms for Guardians ad Litem, such as an oversight board.

Classify county and tribal-level dedicated bench(es) for cases that include domestic and sexual violence.

Increase funding for civil legal services to ensure more DV survivors have representation in family court.

Redirect funds from law enforcement and carceral systems toward non-carceral, evidence-based anti-violence accountability programs for use with Family Court case parties found to have engaged in DV.



PREVENTION AND YOUTH

School-to-Prison Pipeline

As a result of the school-to-prison pipeline, **Black students are 3x more likely to be suspended than their white peers.** Mass incarceration and youth criminalization are primary forms of racial oppression and control in the United States.

Children and youth are not criminals; our approach to supporting young people during critical years of education and development must encourage growth, healing, and accountability outside of a legal system that criminalizes them from a young age.

PRIORITIES

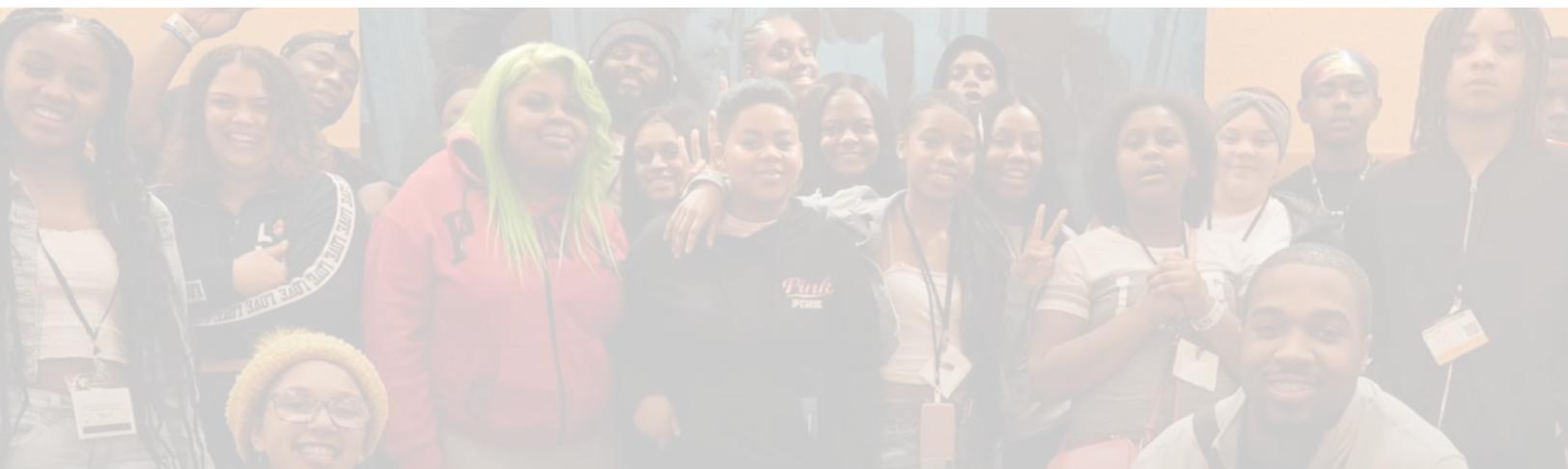
Invest in the future of young people - We support breaking the generational cycle of violence via investment in our young people. We call for increased funding for public education, instead of excessive security procedures, police intervention and other disciplinary policies that push youth into juvenile corrections and adult prisons, creating the school to prison pipeline.

Remove police from schools - We must support educational environments that are safe, equitable, and productive for all students.

End discriminatory dress code practices in schools - Traditional dress codes punish marginalized students disproportionately. We support youth efforts in creating fair and equitable dress codes.

“Schools can be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons.”

Angela Davis





TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

A CDC report found that among victims of sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, **more than 1 in 5 teens first experienced some form of violence by that partner before age 18**. Rates of sexual and dating violence are particularly high for students with physical disabilities or health issues & LGBTQIA2S+ students.

Youth who experience sexual and dating violence are more likely to experience symptoms of **depression & anxiety**, engage in unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco, drug, and alcohol abuse, exhibit antisocial behaviors, think about, or **attempt suicide**, and **experience victimization later in life**.

PRIORITIES

“As we heal ourselves, we heal our ancestors and transform the future for our children.”

Dr. Corrinne Sanchez

Center the voices of disenfranchised youth.

Invest in resources that support young folks' access to safety.

Encourage young folks to think critically about the socially-constructed gender binary, and to identify how oppressive gendered expectations reinforce unhealthy relationship dynamics.

Integrate teen dating violence prevention education into classroom instruction for 7-12th grade students. The curricula should give students the tools to recognize warning signs of abuse and healthy relationship dynamics, from an anti-racist, sex-positive, and LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive lens.

CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM & TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Wisconsin has some of the most racially disparate criminal justice outcomes in the nation.

We rank 2nd in the country for Black incarceration rates. We are 1 of only 5 states that incarcerate Black people over ten times the rate of whites - in fact, Black people in WI are incarcerated 11.5 times more than whites. **Women are the fastest-growing segment of the prison population and prisons hold some of the densest per-capita populations of trauma survivors in the world.** Incarceration focuses on punishment and ignores healing, support, accountability, and repair.

"many survivors want de-escalation, not criminalization...It is only in developing real solutions to harm that we stand a chance of centering and meeting the needs of all survivors."

Mariame Kaba

All forms of violence and oppression are interconnected. At the intersection of DV and racial inequities, the criminal legal system often fails victims and survivors of domestic violence.

For the past 30 years, **increased policing, prosecution, and imprisonment** have been the primary policy solutions to end gender-based violence.

There exist **inseparable ties between patterns of victims being arrested, the over-policing of and police violence against Black and Brown bodies, economic violence, and the criminal-legal system.** This response has proven inadequate and harmful. Survivors are often arrested when acting in self-defense.

Black communities and other communities of color are disproportionately targeted by police, resulting in many survivors choosing not to call for help, in fear that they or their partner will be harmed or killed during police intervention.

Marginalized survivors are most harmed by an over-reliance on the criminal legal system.

Since marginalized survivors are less likely to engage with the system, a response to DV that relies primarily on criminalization and legal responses is most likely to exclude them. State intervention can never guarantee safety for survivors so long as fear and active harm result from engagement with it.

Criminalization does not repair the harm done to survivors, nor does it prevent the harm from happening again. A carceral response overlooks the importance of exit options, support, and healing. Laws criminalizing abuse do not help survivors with nowhere to go.

We have criminalized survival by “blaming individual people for social problems rather than the government and corporate policies which have and continue to create the conditions of inequality.” Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing*

Police manage the social problems produced by this system of exploitation, a system that generates massive wealth inequalities; dismantles the welfare state; and creates homelessness, untreated mental illness, substance use dependency, and overall poor health outcomes.

Survival in this system is penalized by turning outcomes of this system of exploitation into crimes – addiction, poverty, mental illness, unwanted pregnancy, black markets for sex work and stolen goods – and addressing them with citations, arrests, violence, incarceration, and death.

Cuts to public funding, as well as implementation of policies that undermine workers' rights and limit access to health, safety, and wellbeing have coincided with significant investment and expansion in the criminal legal system.

The evidence is clear

that domestic violence is more prevalent and more severe in the context of economic distress.

The criminal legal system perpetuates poverty:

folks caught in the system experience unemployment and both stigma and discrimination upon re-entry into society. Instability is created in vulnerable communities by removing vital, caregiving community members. Safety can only exist when all survivors have access to the support that they need without fear of violent, state-sanctioned harm.

PRIORITIES

Shift the work, resourcing, and responsibility of care into local communities and away from traditional policing and prison responses by supporting the advancement of alternative community-based practices that resist abuse and oppression and encourage safety, support and accountability.

Decriminalize survival - We advocate for transformative justice practices such as dismantling inequitable criminal legal approaches like mandatory arrest, failure to protect, bail (fines and fees), and the criminalization of homelessness and street economies (sex work, drug trades, etc.)

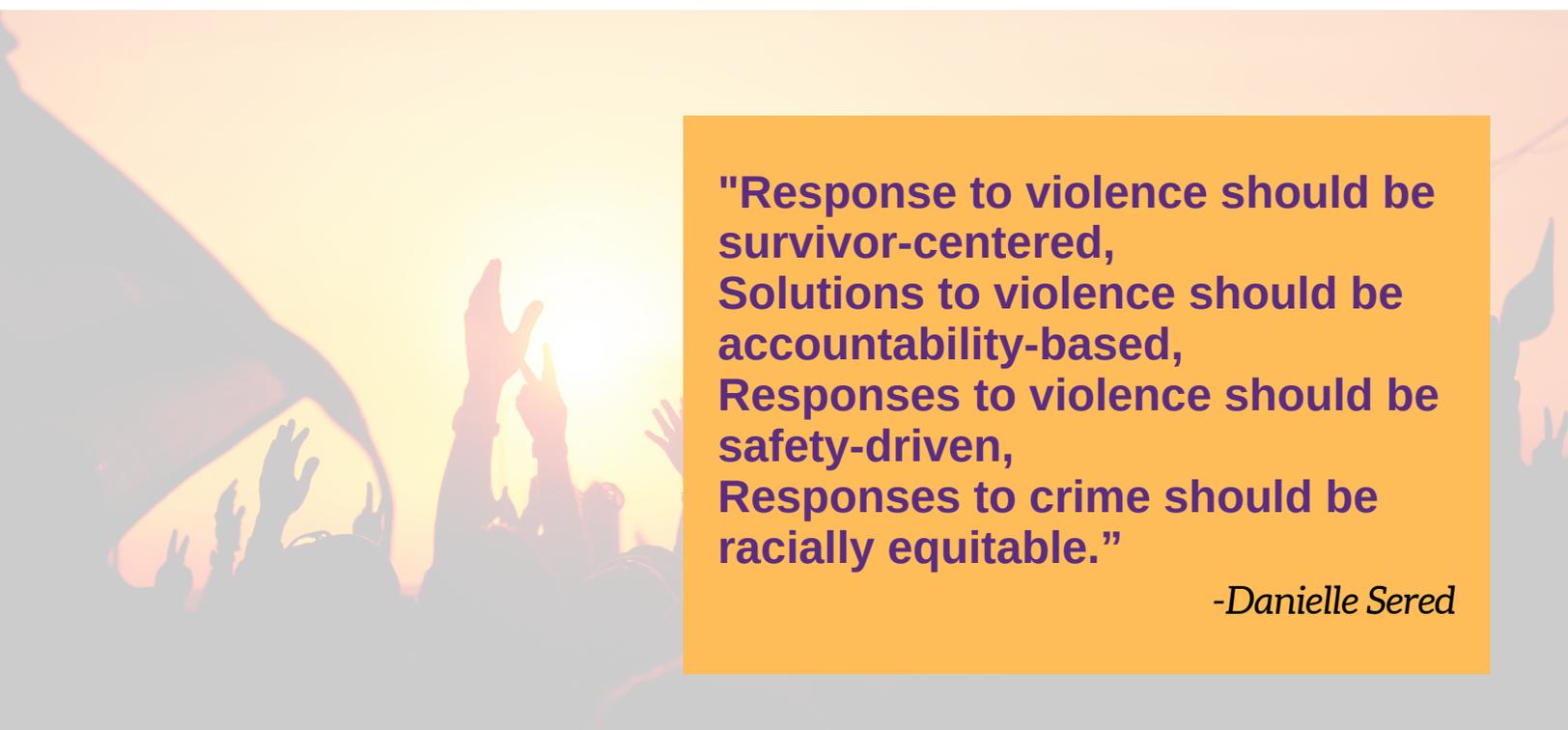
Support policies and resources that foster Indigenous sovereignty and address the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit peoples.

Eliminate policies that require survivors to engage with the criminal system to be eligible for needed safety and benefits, including access to Victim Compensation and interactions with the Child Welfare System.

Center non-carceral responses to ending violence that support the most marginalized survivors.

Release and support those incarcerated for surviving violence.

Fund employment programs for formerly incarcerated folks to support their long-term stability.



**"Response to violence should be survivor-centered,
Solutions to violence should be accountability-based,
Responses to violence should be safety-driven,
Responses to crime should be racially equitable."**

-Danielle Sered

ACCOUNTABILITY OVER PUNISHMENT

The criminal legal frame renders questions about why people act the way they do irrelevant; it only matters that they have acted.

Intimate partner violence is explained as one person's desire to have power and control over their partner; and we stop at power and control. If we want to change problematic behaviors, we need to ask why someone might want or need to feel empowered or in control. Only by understanding what motivates violent behavior can we make informed choices about how to curtail it.

PRIORITIES

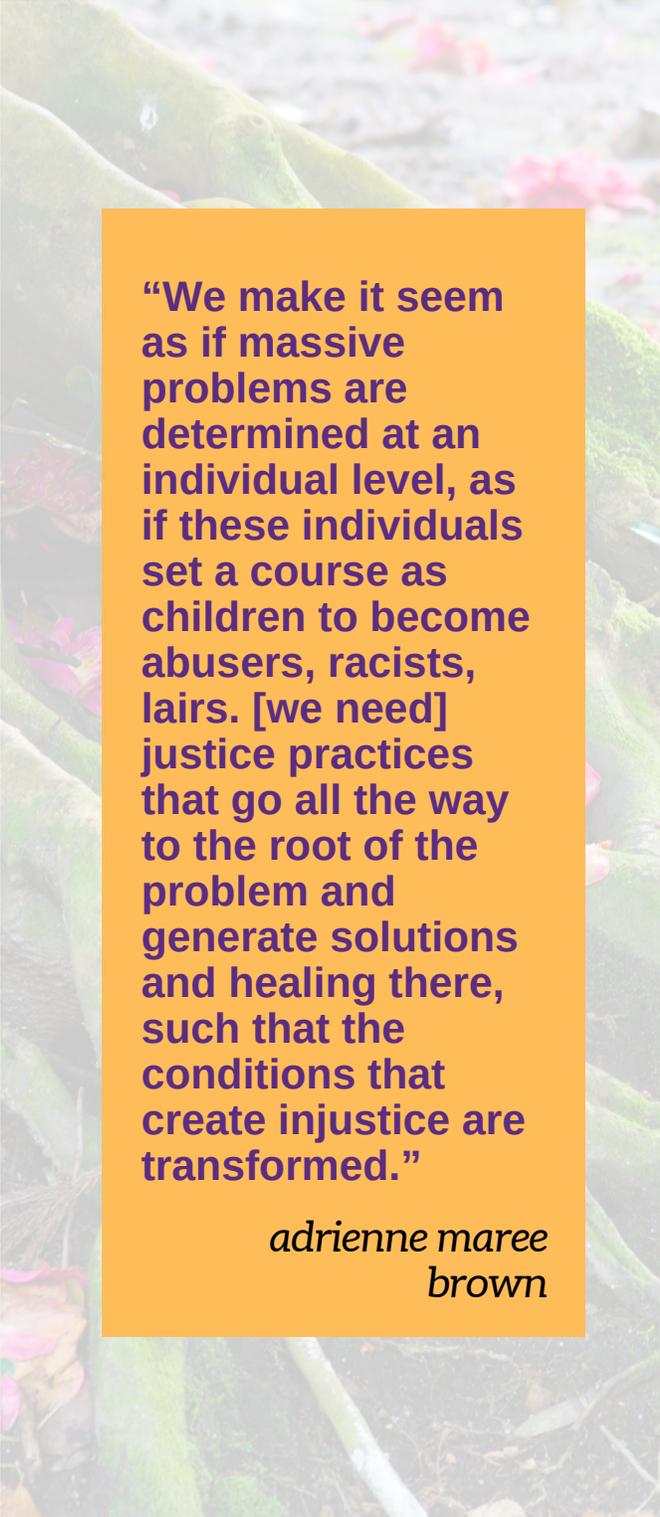
Act with a more expansive view of justice - Exploring alternatives to the criminal legal system does not mean abandoning the idea of justice for those subjected to abuse. Instead, such exploration facilitates more expansive thinking about what justice means and gives people subjected to abuse the opportunity to seek justice in a wider variety of forms. It ensures that those who use harm are held accountable.

Explore work that addresses the root conditions which allow harm to happen in the first place and identify strategies that hold harm-doers accountable in ways that do not perpetuate further harm.

Limit incarceration to the last response, not the first.

Redistribute funds from law enforcement and carceral systems toward community-based transformative justice programs that foster accountability for harm-doers and culturally-specific approaches to healing.

Develop a holistic approach to justice. We have become accustomed to a society that reacts to social problems with policing and incarceration instead of by investing in prevention. It can be difficult to imagine a world that we have never lived in. We urge our community to imagine a world where we invest millions of dollars to ensure food security, housing, mental health services, resourced schools, and safety; where we invest in people and prioritize community.



“We make it seem as if massive problems are determined at an individual level, as if these individuals set a course as children to become abusers, racists, liars. [we need] justice practices that go all the way to the root of the problem and generate solutions and healing there, such that the conditions that create injustice are transformed.”

*adrienne maree
brown*

FUNDING

Domestic violence programs are chronically underfunded, particularly those that are culturally-specific, apply transformative and restorative justice techniques, operate outside of the criminal legal apparatus, or focus on prevention or those who have harmed.

VAWA's two largest grant programs provide a significant portion of their funds to the criminal legal system despite repeated studies showing that housing is the single greatest need identified by survivors. Funding the criminal legal system does not prevent harm, nor does it support survivors' journey to healing and stability.

PRIORITIES

Develop new funding specifically for BIPOC communities.

Support funding of DV programs as we work to reform funding streams, so they meet needs that survivors of violence identify.

Encourage a national strategy for updating the VOCA statute to ensure continued deposits at a sufficient level, one that sustains current or increased funding levels while planning and advocating for a strategic shift in how that funding is distributed.

Advocate for equitably-funded COVID-19 relief for DV programs and survivors.

Demand the expansion of public welfare and funding of community resources.



IMMIGRATION AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Wisconsin's DV programs report dramatic decreases in the willingness of Latinx and immigrant victims to engage with the justice system.

The heightened fear of deportation and separation from families means undocumented victims of violence are afraid to seek help, even when they are directly in harm's way.

Because of their immigration status and associated barriers, undocumented victims of domestic abuse are unlikely to file restraining orders to stay safe from abuse, report violent crimes, file for divorce to maintain custody of their children, and seek out social safety net services that would help them live independently of their abusive partner.

Further, the climate crisis exacerbates human migration as those most marginalized in our international community seek safety from climate-related conflict. While environmental justice impacts all of us, those who are already most marginalized are disproportionately impacted, and we must develop both immigration and climate policies that account for the overlap between our social and environmental ecosystems.

PRIORITIES

Oppose legislation that entangles local law enforcement with federal immigration enforcement agencies like ICE.

Support and expand protections from immigration enforcement in sensitive locations like homes, schools, hospitals, places of worship, courtrooms, etc.

Permit undocumented immigrants to acquire drivers' licenses and state IDs.

Support legislation that centers climate justice, especially policies supported by Indigenous climate justice leaders.

Divest from and oppose exploitative resource extraction. Pipeline expansions and fossil fuel extraction projects exacerbate the climate crisis, and they contribute to increased victimization of vulnerable communities. Human trafficking and the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit peoples are intricately connected to fossil fuel extraction in Wisconsin. We stand with Indigenous leadership in demanding protection and respect for Native lives.

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