



Legal Services Committee  
April 18, 2024

Amy Smith	HCDVCC
Alexia Rauén	Advocates for Immigrant Survivors
Rebecca Council	HCDVCC
Libby Hasse	Tahirih
Thecia Jenkins	HCDVCC
Fanisha Washington	HCDVCC
Norma Martinez	HCDVCC
Celina Wells	KCM

Amy Smith opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Celina Wells stated that KCM will be holding their 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Superhero Day honoring the Methodist West SANE Nurses on April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9:00 at Katy City Hall. She also stated that they received a Counseling Reduction and Advocacy Enhancement grant. She was able to hire 2 new counselors and 1 advocate. Their clients must be Adult Sexual Assault clients, so they have had to shift so clients around, but they have a short wait list for counseling. They are providing short term (around 12 to 26) therapy sessions. They have 2 bi-lingual counselors and the best way to access their services is to call their hotline.

Amy asked if the HPD situation had affected any agencies. Celina said no one has really mentioned it. Alexia stated one of their clients had got a letter from HPD but it was in English, so they did not understand what it meant.

Alexia Rauén announced they are getting referrals from several different agencies for U Visa and VAWA petitions and their new Survivor Advocate had started. Their clients are still scared about SB4 even though it is on pause for now.

Libby Hasse said Tahirih has been doing trainings on “Know Your Rights”. They are also seeing lots of fear among their clients but no actual repercussions yet. Houston is not seeing a lot of smuggling prosecutions yet either however there is some concerns about advocates transporting undocumented clients for any reason. There is a fear they could be prosecuted under the new smuggling statute. They have been advised to do as little transporting as possible. The Texas Immigration Law Council (txlic.org) headed up by Anne Chandler offering technical assistance around this issue. TCFV is also doing some T.A. on this issue as well. Tahirih has restructured a bit and is currently reopen for business. They are doing intakes and talking about cases their capacity is still limited but they can take some cases.

A discussion took place about unethical attorneys who are demanding clients pay large fees for VAWA petitions. They are hoping to get correct information about to the public about fees for U Visas and VAWA petitions.

Thecia Jenkins announced The Way Home will have an Inaugural Conference for caseworkers working with DV clients on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. She has also been working with WorkSource on a series of trainings and implementing the trainings into their Policies and Procedures. She also has trainings scheduled with Busy Bee, the Probation Dept, the HCSO. In February she hosted a Roundtable on Domestic Violence in the Black Community with a follow-up discussion on May 21<sup>st</sup>. Planning is in the works for a Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> Roundtable for DV in the Hispanic Community. Members of Voices of Freedom will lead that discussion.

Amy Smith introduced Fanisha Washington, HCDVCC's new Protective Court Advocate.

Norma Martinez stated the DV High Risk Team is still extremely busy. She has notice that clients are hiring private attorneys to help get their work permits faster. Alexia and Libby stated that for some reason there was a huge influx of work permits released at the end of 2023. Hiring an attorney will not help get them any faster. Work permits for asylum seekers seem to be moving faster than they have in the past, but 2018 cases are still being processed and new cases have not even been started yet.

Amy Smith stated it looks like a training on Immigration is needed. She will contact Alexia and Libby to put something together. Alejandro Alvarado has agreed to help with planning the CJ 101 follow up training but the more the merrier in the planning.

Meeting adjourned.

Our next meeting will be May 16<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 via ZOOM. Remember we are meeting on ZOOM, not Teams so log on to the ZOOM link in the body of the email.