
2023 Policy Priorities to End Domestic & Sexual Violence

For more information, please connect with

Kristen Schwartz, JD, Executive Director

Tara Muir, JD, Public Policy Director

307.755.5481





Introduction

The following policy priorities are part of the solution to end domestic and sexual violence and is built on the current Strategic Plan of the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (WCADVSA). The WCADVSA is a private 501(c)(3) non-profit and is organized as a coalition of dues paying member programs who serve victims. These programs are community-based non-profit programs themselves and cover each of the 23 counties across Wyoming.

WCADVSA Mission: Through a collective voice, the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is committed to provide leadership, education, and systems advocacy to advance social change and end violence.

The WCADVSA Overall Strategic Goals:

- **Partnerships.** To provide leadership and facilitate partnerships among victim advocates, allied state and national organizations.
- **Quality Services.** To promote quality services, education, technical assistance, legal services and advocacy to advocates and programs.
- **Prevention & Social Change.** To engage in prevention, social change, and policy efforts that challenge the social, economic and political conditions that sustain a culture of violence in which domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking is condoned.
- **Sustainability.** To increase the overall programmatic and financial stability of the WCADVSA.

Our public policy work focuses on advocating for legislation in the Wyoming State Legislature and Congress, educating our membership about the policy process, and assisting them in communicating with their elected officials. We also provide input on court rules and state agency policies related to stalking, domestic violence and sexual assault matters, as well as participate on committees and work groups that address a variety of social justice issues.

WCADVSA Key Issues Impacted by the Wyoming Legislature and U.S. Congress

Civil Legal Services – In addition to providing direct legal services through WCADVSA's legal team, key objectives in the civil law arena are to:

- promote victim rights,
- provide protections and options for victims, and
- promote development of policy that increases access to the legal system.

Criminal Legal System – Victims are generally encouraged to turn to the criminal justice system which ideally provides an objective legal process by which victims can seek redress for the crimes of stalking, domestic violence, and sexual assault. Historically and currently, however, victims feel hesitant about coming forward out of fear that the criminal justice system will neither respect nor protect them. Therefore, WCADVSA advocates to:

- Provide leadership, accountability to survivors, guiding principles, and best/promising practices.
- Safeguard confidential communications between advocates and victims.
- Work to promote and provide technical assistance for communities with multi-disciplinary teams and/or communities aspiring to coordinate a criminal justice response to victims.
- Address how technology impacts the safety, privacy and accessibility rights of victims.
- Promote victims’ rights and offender accountability by highlighting the benefits of victim centered policy.

Economic Justice – Economic abuse and its devastating consequences impede survivors’ ability to move from short-term safety to long-term security, and to an economically sustainable independent life. Therefore the WCADVSA advocates to:

- Integrate quality economic justice initiatives, options, and programs into local and State efforts.
- Issues include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and affordable healthcare, living wage, gender wage gap and trafficking crimes.

Housing – Many victims of these crimes are forced to live in unsafe, brutal conditions simply because they have no way of financially supporting themselves and their children, and consequently have no place to live. Victims fleeing this violence in very rural areas and for whom support services are unavailable or insufficient desperately need affordable, non-temporary housing options and expanded, holistic, victim centered support services. Therefore, WCADVSA advocates to:

- Develop options in short term shelter, transitional and long term housing.
- Increase safe and affordable housing options for victims.

Marginalized Populations – Communities of diverse ethnicity, racial backgrounds, faith, immigrants, undocumented residents, Native American Indians, or lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex and queer people (LGBTQ+) experience the denial of equal access to basic opportunities such as education, medical care, and social services. These populations are more at risk for sexual violence than others due to barriers. Barriers to services exist due to communication and language, lack of culturally appropriate services, prejudice and cultural differences, social tolerance of violence, fear of the system, and poverty. Therefore WCADVSA advocates to increase access to comprehensive, victim-centered, culturally specific, community-based services and justice systems for marginalized populations.

Primary Prevention – The anti-violence movement initially focused on the immediate needs of victims. As services expanded to include prevention, it became apparent that although the majority of perpetrators were men, society as a whole refused to acknowledge the depth of the problems of stalking, domestic violence and sexual assault. Early prevention programming concentrated on “risk reduction” and self-defense strategies for women, which can unfairly place the burden on women to affect behavioral change rather than on all of us.

Primary prevention promotes healthy environments and behaviors and reduces the likelihood or frequency of violence occurring. Therefore, WCADVSA advocates to:

- Increase the resource capacity of local programs, community, state and allied partners to further develop and implement primary prevention initiatives.
- Create and sustain a statewide infrastructure to build, support, and connect state and local prevention work.
- Promote the prevention of these crimes in Wyoming by educating allies and stakeholders regarding the benefits of primary prevention, and the continuum of prevention through and including intervention services.

State Policy Process

Because the experiences and perspectives of our local Wyoming member programs are critical to the decisions on Wyoming and U.S. public policy, WCADVSA makes it a priority to be in continuous communication with the programs and their leaders.

The WCADVSA Public Policy Director creates and maintains a Legislative Agenda for the general public, stakeholder partners, and legislators for each biennial session and for Congress, which is greatly informed by the member programs. This agenda will include a list of legislation which WCADVSA supports, opposes and monitors.

Recent Abortion Position:

In March of 2022, facing the abortion ban in the Wyoming Legislature, our membership agreed to take a pro-choice stance. The WCADVSA opposes the over-reaching act of power and control that the state will exert on people who are facing an unplanned pregnancy by banning the healthcare option of abortion. Our bedrock duty as advocates is to support and empower victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, to walk beside them whatever their choices, and to restore the notion of freedom back into their lives. This is a deeply personal and individual right afforded to women in 1973 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

An exception for rape and incest is unworkable; It is likely the majority of women who become pregnant from a sexual assault or incest would not have access to an abortion even with a an exception. We also know that domestic violence perpetrators use access to birth control, abortion, rape and pregnancy to control their victims.

Firearms Policy Statement – Safety for Victim/Survivors

WCADVSA ideally opposes any legislation that would expand access to firearms and the places where firearms can legally be carried, given the high rate of domestic violence homicides as a result of firearms.

WCADVSA supports the enactment of legislation that provides an enforcement mechanism for the retrieval of firearms from those who have been convicted of domestic violence offenses and those who are subject to a domestic violence protective order, per federal law.