

AGENDA MATERIAL

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Emerge!
Center Against
Domestic Abuse

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November 27, 2020

Pima County Board of Supervisors
130 W. Congress Street
Tucson, Arizona 85701

Dear Supervisors:

As the only comprehensive domestic violence (DV) service provider in Pima County, Emerge Center Against Domestic Abuse wholeheartedly supports the "Declaring Racial and Ethnic Health Inequities and Income Inequality In Pima County to be a Public Health Crisis" resolution put forth by Supervisor Villegas, and strongly encourages the Board of Supervisors to unanimously pass the resolution as part of an important message and commitment to our community. Our communities are saturated with violence and DV is a public health crisis where there are clear disparities in our collective response as a result of systemic racism and oppression. Those experiencing DV in our community face an uphill battle to survive (literally) the violence they face, to be believed, and to access support systems and resources to increase their safety. This is exponentially exacerbated for Black, Indigenous and People of color who also face intersecting forms of harm, oppression and resources that do not meet their needs or account for their life experiences – which, in turn, reinforces harmful messages about their experience having less value.

For example, research from Dr. Jaquelyn Campbell of Johns Hopkins University revealed that DV homicide is the 4th leading cause of death for Hispanic/Latinx women ages 15-24, and the 3rd leading cause of death among Hispanic/Latinx women ages 25-34 years old. Another study showed that immigrant Latina victims reported being less likely to call the police due to heightened immigration enforcement policies and increased fear of deportation. These victims also report immigration status is often used as a control tactic by their abusive partner. This includes their partner not submitting their documentation paperwork, threatening to have them deported, etc. When a victim does not have legal status in the United States, but the abusive partner and the children are legal citizens/residents, another tactic – and very real risk – can be for the abusive partner to take away an immigrant victim's children via the court system.

Native/Indigenous women face even grimmer realities. The plight of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) is rarely discussed in the media or public discourse, but is extraordinarily prevalent and growing exponentially. Additionally, 56% of native/indigenous women experience physical intimate partner violence in their lifetimes, and 67% experience psychological abuse. Up to 90% of the court cases heard in our local Tribal courts are DV cases. Research from Dr. Jaquelyn Campbell shows that DV homicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for native/indigenous women ages 15-24 years old, and the 5th leading cause of death for native/indigenous women ages 25-34. This is compared to it being the 8th leading cause of death for white/Caucasian women of the same age. And, perhaps most noteworthy, according to the Indian Law Resource Center, non-Indigenous people commit over 90% of the sexual violence against Indigenous women. Until very recently, federal law prevented Native American tribes from arresting and prosecuting non-Native Americans who committed DV

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crimes on tribal lands. The federal government had criminal jurisdiction over these cases but rarely prosecuted them, leaving tribal victims at risk.



Black women are also suffering from intimate partner violence at rates higher than their white counterparts. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 54% of Black women have experienced intimate partner violence, and 49% have experienced PTSD, required urgent medical care and/or needed housing or legal services as a direct result of intimate partner violence. Eight percent (8%) have experienced rape at the hands of an intimate partner and 17% have experienced sexual violence other than rape from a partner. Too often, when a Black woman reaches out for help and support, they are met with inadequate responses that label them as problematic and somehow to blame for the violence they are experiencing. The resulting impact is further mistrust of the systems that are supposed to provide them with safety and support.

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Beyond these statistics are human beings – friends, family members, neighbors, coworkers. Human beings who have, far too often, have their effort to access support and services related to DV hindered because so many of us have failed to understand how racism has seeped into our way of operating as systems. These systems – including education, public health and private healthcare, criminal justice, law enforcement and human services – have pushed many people into the invisible margins of our community. Racism and anti-blackness are rampant in the systems designed to support survivors and often does not account for their historical and current lived experiences, and that means those survivors have less access overall to safety. This truth only serves to further the isolation that so many survivors endure as a result of abuse and further puts their lives at risk. The systems are perpetrating the very dynamics we are all here to address.

Emerge is not exempt from this responsibility. We acknowledge our role as an institutional non-profit and how we have operated in ways that do not acknowledge how the brokenness of our systems has left so many survivors in our community to find their own way. To that end, Emerge is undertaking a massive internal effort to ensure that our agency and its services better meet the needs of all people in our community who are experiencing abuse. To eradicate anti-Blackness and other forms of racism in our agency. To ensure that we see the full humanity of all people, and deliver support and services accordingly. We hope to see more of this throughout the community, and believe the Pima County Board of Supervisor's adoption of this resolution is an important call for change within County government and throughout all of Pima County.

Sincerely,

Ed Mercurio-Sakwa, CEO

Anna Harper-Guerrero, Executive Vice President & Chief Strategy Officer