

DR. MATT HEINZ

Supervisor
District 2



33 N Stone Ave., 11th Floor
Tucson, AZ 85701
(520) 724-2702
district2@pima.gov

Pima County Board of Supervisors

To: Julie Castañeda, Clerk of the Board
From: Dr. Matt Heinz, Supervisor, District 2
Date: Thursday, October 14, 2021
RE: Item for the October 19, 2021 Agenda

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "MH", followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right.

Please add the following to the October 19, 2021 Addendum Agenda:

Discussion: Presentation from Homicide Survivors Executive Director James Gierke about the crucial services the organization provides to members of the Pima County community in times of crisis, particularly as homicide rates have spiked this year, and their sustained support for the families of homicide victims (see attachment).



HOMICIDE **SURVIVORS**, INC
2315 E. Speedway BLVD
Tucson, Arizona 85719
520-207-5012
www.homicidesurvivorsinc.org
hsi@azhomicidesurvivors.org

October 12, 2021

Homicide Survivors, Inc. (HSI) is non-partisan 401 (c)(3) non-profit and has been an integral part of victim services response in Pima County for nearly 40 years.

Homicide rates in Tucson are up 50% calendar year-to-date. In that same time, HSI has seen a more than 80% increase in demand for services. HSI met most of its annual projections for services in the first quarter of this year. HSI hired additional staff, utilizing the organization's reserves to meet the ongoing demand for increased services. We have provided services to 1800 unique individuals so far, this year.

In response to the spike in violence in the community, HSI established an enhanced partnership program with The Pima County Sheriff's Department (PCSD) and The Tucson Police Department (TPD) to proactively reach out to Survivors to increase access to appropriate services.

This partnership resulted in HSI Advocates being embedded with Homicide detectives at the Sheriff's department, as well as TPD. As a result, HSI advocates respond to crime victims more quickly and comprehensively, often on-scene. Immediate intervention as a community partner of law enforcement allowed crisis and trauma-trained victim advocates to identify opportunities to prevent escalating violence within impacted families. It's been such a success, that last week HSI was asked to expand our embedded advocate program to address DV lethality prevention.

HSI also partnered with the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) to develop a community-based intervention protocol that HSI has implemented in partnership with law enforcement. This community-based violence reduction protocol organizes and activates community members to proactively work to reduce violence. We are proud of our proactive and innovative work.

Acute challenges are facing us now, and they are directly related to the impact of Covid-19.

One primary form of assistance we provide is focused on preventing homelessness for families suffering a loss of household income due to the homicide of a family member. HSI provides emergency rent and utility payments to assist those families with sheltering in place. Year to date, HSI has spent more \$70,000 on direct rent and utility assistance due to the increase in homicide and associated additional financial and systemic issues that were exacerbated by the pandemic. That's 7X pre-Covid-19 numbers. Total impact of Covid-19 on our organization's reserves exceeds \$300,000.

There is a housing crisis looming in our community due to a lack of affordable inventory, and many survivors of homicide victims are at risk. There are increasingly common stories, like a case we are currently working on where the survivor has spent more than \$350 (at \$50 each) on applications for rental units, only to be denied due to the current competitive nature of housing applications. Without our direct assistance, her family would already be on the street.

In 2020, Our organization suffered a double whammy. At the end of 2019, VOCA-funded victim service programs suffered significant budget cuts due to a lack of available funds on both federal and state levels. HSI's funding was cut by 30%.

When Covid-19-impacted Tucson, HSI was forced to cancel fundraising events, and the economic hardships encountered by HSI's corporate and private funders resulted in another significant decrease in funding. HSI was prepared for a rainy day and had significant reserves in place. As with many organizations, those reserves were not sufficient for the impacts of Covid-19.

In answering our community's call, we have completely depleted our reserves. The decrease in available funds means we have to reduce staffing and in so doing, reduce our services in the community. Our fellow community members, survivors of homicide victims, deserve better.

Sincerely,

James Gierke

Executive Director, Homicide Survivors, Inc.