

Danielle Greene

AGENDA MATERIAL

DATE 10-29-21 ITEM NO. RA9

From: James Gierke <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, October 29, 2021 3:17 PM
To: COB_mail
Subject: Agenda item number 9 for meeting on 11/2/21
Attachments: testimonials-20211029T221549Z-001.zip

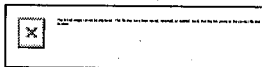
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Hello!

Attached are letters in support of agenda item number 9 for the meeting on Tuesday.

Could these be distributed to all Supervisors, please? There are 9 letters from survivors.

Thank you, and have a lovely weekend.



James Gierke

Executive Director

Homicide Survivors, Inc.

He/Him/His



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James.gierke@azhomicidesurvivors.org



Homicidesurvivorsinc.org



2315 E. Speedway Blvd., Tucson, Arizona, 85719

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To the Pima County Board Members,
Hello my name is Adriana Norzagaray-Vasquez, my husband Victor Alonso Vasquez was murdered August 5, 2017. The first months I don't remember much we were married for 22 years, he was my best friend my husband the father of our children and we thought we would be together forever. Late October or November I don't remember I always got calls from a Homicide Survivor Advocate she called me weekly and I would think what does she want, I would get up go to work and get home and lay down, finally I told my kids we need help let's try going to there support meetings and see if it will help us, we walked in and felt a love and understanding we had not felt since that horrible day, everyone there cared and knew exactly what we were feeling, we finally felt at home where nobody questioned us why we were crying or why were sad, we started going to there events the thanksgiving potluck we really enjoyed because my husband loved to eat and we could make some food he really enjoyed and be around our new friends. My daughter Aliyah and me went to equine therapy for 6 weeks it taught us a lot about grounding ourselves and living the moment this was offered by Homicide Survivors and was a great experience, our son also went to equine therapy with another group and he loved it, we went to multiple workshops that help us keep our minds busy and we don't go crazy thinking. Both our kids Victor Jr and Aliyah went to therapy at the Jewish foundation and are currently seeing Peggy who is awesome also offered by Homicide Survivors. Without this group I really don't know where we would be at our son stayed in his room for a year and a half crying he was in a deep depression I would get home after working 12 hours and would make him shower and eat, his fear was awful, our daughter Aliyah was a senior at Tucson high and she just didn't care about school her grades where awful straight Fs, she got her grades up and graduated, HSI also paid our electric bill one time that I couldn't afford to pay it. HSI is a great program for us survivors that are left in the dark, where we feel lonely, lost and in total pain we are so grateful for this awesome program, the community needs this program to keep going, not only for me and my family but for every family it makes a difference to get a hug and be around people that know exactly what you are feeling

Thank you
Adriana Norzagaray
[REDACTED]

Dear Pima County Board Members,

My name is Aliyah Adrianna Vasquez, my father Victor Alonso Vasquez was murdered on August 5 2017, my dad was not only my dad he was my best friend my one to go with any problems, I was his little princess and when I found myself so lost Homicide Survivors helped me my mom and brother, we went to support meetings where I never talked I would sit and watch but every story touched my heart and soul, because I was feeling the same pain, they sponsored equine therapy for us also, when I walked in I thought what is a horse going to do for me, but I was wrong it helped me in many ways, the workshops where so fun we got to paint or do something fun that would keep my mind of everything going on . They also helped me with therapy first we went to the Jewish foundation but it didn't work for me, currently I'm seeing Peggy she is the best she takes my words out of my mouth, now I can sit and talk about my feelings, I miss my daddy so much and seeing my mom hide her sadness so me and my brother feel better sometimes hurts me because I wish things were different, HSI has been a gods send in my eyes who knows what would of happened to us with out there support and care this is a long road for all homicide survivors that we have to go through and having an organization like this who we can talk to and feel like we aren't getting judged is the best.

Thank you,

Aliyah A Vasquez

[REDACTED]

Dear Pima County Board of Directors,

My son and I are both homicide survivors. We were referred over to HSI back in December, 2020 for support and community resources to assist us in our healing during the sudden tragic and emotionally crippling loss of my son's father. I struggled for MANY months not knowing where to begin to look for support for my son and I or who to reach out to from March, 2020 through December, 2020? I first learned of this organization in December, 2020. Since I reached out they have been so helpful and so wonderful to our needs in so many ways!

I have actively relied on them for so many community resources, referrals, therapy, and just help at times! This organization has significantly helped me through SO many life issues and needs and I feel that without them I would not be as functioning today or able to get through all of the events that life has thrown our way. Paloma Sainz is and from day one has been my victim advocate and case manager and the most amazing/encouraging person that I desperately needed when I initially reach out. I have relied on HSI and Paloma during this entire process.

When someone like myself experiences the type of tragic loss and events that occurred during the loss they cannot help but not be trusting and feel out of place and lost in the community surrounding them. Paloma and HSI have made me feel like we are NOT alone and have gained that trust that is needed to be able to assist someone that has experienced what I have and lacks the trust/understanding of the community surrounding them. I have and currently still actively rely on them for weekly case management/support sessions. They not only ensure that progress is being made with our healing but have also assisted us with our referral to JFCS for much needed trauma/grief counseling, have helped provide legal guidance and advocacy of our rights, and helped us gain access to legal counsel/referrals throughout Pima County.

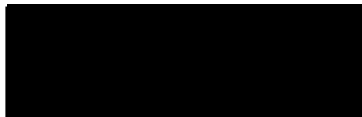
I am so thankful that I chose to reach out to them and continue to seek assistance from them as needed. The appreciation for them is more than I can ever even express to you!!!

They have helped in so many ways to provide us all we need and have put in and dedicated so many hours to ensure that myself and my son receive the support we need to help us heal and restore/help us to be able to work through the pain and PTSD by providing or finding us the support to live again in a normal manner. I hope that this organization continues to receive the funding needed to continue to help others and serve our community the way that they have helped me and my son this past year and that I can one day return the favor and give back to someone else the way they have given the time, research, support and resources to me.

Best Regards,

Ashley Bernal

Homicide Survivor



From: Jae [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, Oct 22, 2021 at 12:01 AM
Subject: Letter for HSI
To: Sylvia Alvarez [REDACTED]

10/21/21

To whom it may concern

I am forwarding this letter on behalf of "HSI," during our hardship HSI has been here for our family, helping us to get back on track with the struggles that we have endured while losing our loved one' my Husband. We have been rebuilding ourselves, moving forward and focusing with life in general. We are all doing our best to stay strong & am doing what I can as a single parent raising my kids to the best of my knowledge.

During these hard times I found myself needing assistance with our rent & electricity. HSI was able to support me by paying the bills when we were at our lowest moment in time, yet it's been a challenge and still learning to cope with all that has been going on around us. We are still in the process of healing, finding ways to keep our strength up and stand strong through out all this sorrow.

We the Family Appreciate all the Love, Caring, Sharing, Helpful Assistance that you all have provided and would like to Thank You all so much along with the many who have Helped & Supported HSI throughout their time of need. This

**too will help us to know that, "We Are Not Alone." Have a
Blessed Day Much Love & Respect.**

**Fr. Jae Conde
& Family**

From: **Kay Moreno** [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, Oct 21, 2021 at 12:56 PM
Subject: Re: HSI Needs Your Help!
To: Sylvia Alvarez [REDACTED]

Dear Pima County Board of Supervisors,

My name is Kay Moreno, and I lost my Son James Kozar in 2016 to Homicide.

My Son did not deserve to die. He had dedicated his life to serving his country, and was a retired Navy Chief, college educated, and a Father & Grandfather.

My family was devastated. He was the oldest of my 4 children.

Homicide Survivors were there the next day, to help us out.

Over the next two years, there were there throughout our monthly Court Hearings, and then throughout the Trial.

Because of the devastation of my Son's death, I did not decide to go to their monthly meetings for Survivors until one year later.

What a blessing they were.

I not only found others going through or having gone through the same thing, but could share my grief with others who would understand.

I learned what to expect during the trial. They were there every day for the two weeks of the trial.

There to talk to us before and after the day, with information on what to expect and how to act.

There with pads, pencils, water and tissue, to help us , even sitting beside us for whatever we needed.

They escorted us out to their room, when we could not deal with what was being talked about or pictures being shown.

They were there to guide us on how to write and present our comments to the Judge before sentencing.

They were there when the Verdict came in. As it was a horrendous crime, the verdict was as good as we could have asked for.

My family is very grateful to Homicide Survivors, (HSI)

I believe, all of us here in Pima County are blessed to have such a wonderful program to help us through this tragic time.

I would never want anyone to go through what my family went through, but if it were ever to happen to you, you would want them to be there to guide you.

Their continued support throughout the year with their Survivor meetings and activities, are a continuous support to those of us that have lost a loved one.

Please continue to give HSI the financial support they need to continue their programs.

Unfortunately the Homicides are increasing in Pima County, and more and more people will need their services.

Thank you for reading my letter and thoughtfully consider your support.
Kay Moreno

From: **Mary Roche-Phillips** [REDACTED]
Date: Wed, Oct 20, 2021 at 10:10 PM
Subject: Re: HSI Needs Your Help!
To: Sylvia Alvarez [REDACTED]

Oct. 20, 2021

Hello Sylvia and all,

Four years ago yesterday, Oct. 19th, my brother Jackie/John was assaulted while on a bike ride. He past away nine days later... homicide due to blunt force trauma to his head and face. It took me awhile to be able to talk to anyone about what had happened to my brother.

I finally called Homicide Survivors. I'm not sure who I spoke to the first time, but she was very helpful, kind, comforting and a good listener!

A few weeks later my sister, Genny, and I went to a arts and crafts workshop, with HSI!!!

I was overwhelmed to see how many people have experienced homicide.

That was the first time I met Sylvia, who would be my advocate and friend!

Sylvia saved me in my grief!!! As well as everyone.....

On our one on one, on our support group, zoom so far...

And we've met a couple times in person.

HSI has posted a couple of my poems on Facebook. And they have encouraged me to continue my memoir!

My life has been changed forever because of this catastrophic trauma.

I am very grateful for Sylvia and everyone at HSI ... And all the people I have met!!!

My thoughts and prayers go out to all 

Maggie Roche-Phillips 

October 22, 2021

Dear Pima County Board of Directors,

I'm writing to you in support of Homicide Survivors (HSI), a local grass-roots organization that has been providing my family with services since my son, Jaron, was shot to death in the summer of 2006. I hope you will take a few moments reading this letter to better understand how HSI operates, and why survivors of homicide like me depend on the staff, volunteers, and activities, from the time of death to years later.

I last saw my son on his 26th birthday in July 2006, when we met for his traditional birthday lunch and book shopping. He was excited to tell me he would be starting a new job in a couple weeks and was looking forward to the orientation in a few days. Sadly, nine days later I learned that Jaron was shot to death during an argument – he was inside his home and had been shot at close range through his front door. Later I learned he owed a man \$300 – two men are now in prison for this crime.

There are really no words to accurately describe what happens when your child has been murdered. What I can describe to you, though, is how Homicide Survivors came into my life, and how I continue to benefit from ongoing activities and services they have been providing for many years.

You may think that HSI provides critical services for a short period of time. Nothing is further from the truth, as many survivors need differently targeted support as time goes by.

Within three days of Jaron's death Homicide Survivors contacted me and my son's father. We met with staff and volunteers to learn about what to expect in the case of a murder. An extensive information packet provided detailed material, from how to connect with support groups, questions to ask a coroner and a funeral home, and what to expect if a court case came to be. Never before had I thought about any of the topics contained in the packet and I devoured all the information, while trying to make sense of my son's death at the same time.

Here are several activities that HSI provided us; these and many more are typical of their services. In fact, many families also receive financial assistance from HSI for the unexpected costs associated with such a death. You will easily see the need for funding to help HSI strategically address the needs of our community, especially as homicides continue to increase and more people are affected.

Support Groups – I met weekly with trained personnel to learn how to process my grief with other people with similar experiences. I attended these sessions for many years - each person can determine how often and how long they participate.

Court Proceedings – over 17 months after Jaron's death we were in court almost weekly with a hearing of some type. HSI Crime Victim Advocates were in attendance with me, helping me understand the different types of hearings, questions I might ask the prosecutor, how the process works over time, and, most importantly, how to cope. I was able to maintain some semblance of emotional control with their support.

Equine Therapy – an in-depth experience learning about grief and our journey through it while interacting with a trained therapist and horses. This was an incredible opportunity to expand my ability to cope through different strategies.

Candlelight Vigils – integral to healing is the realization that we are not alone. HSI organizes several vigils every year so that survivors can tell their stories, hear others' and find solace and support in a

special community impacted by violence and loss. Nothing is quite like the beauty of several hundred candles lit in memory of loved ones – which is also a testament to the extensive need we have for HSI to receive the funding necessary to promote health and well-being in spite of such tragedies.

Social media support and information sharing – HSI has built an incredible platform that extends support services in creative and multiple ways. Their hands of service are a touch away and I can read about activities being offered or just read and reflect on daily survivor stories and inspirational messages that bring comfort. Technology affords widespread outreach, yet cannot be accomplished without financial ability.

Ongoing activities – these range from Memorial Walks at All Soul's processions to art therapy to rejuvenating yoga and a myriad of innovative methods to help build resiliency and healing.

I have thankfully participated in all of these services and more. I have been able to function as a contributing member of our community with this help. I know there will never be a time when I don't need strategies and advocates to help me in my efforts to honor and memorialize my son's life.

I hope each of you will take the time needed to truly understand the impact of Homicide Survivors, which requires expertise and resources. They need your support to secure sustainable financial stability, which will allow them to meet their mission of support, advocacy, and assistance. As so well stated on their website:

“Nobody deserves to endure the murder of a loved one alone.”

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have, either by email at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED]. Thank you for carefully considering how Pima County can directly impact so many in need through support of Homicide Survivors.

Sincerely,
Joan Gilbert

Hello,

My name is Jessica Escobedo, and I have been a homicide survivor since 2017 when my beautiful mother Dolores Escobedo was brutally murdered. A homicide survivor was not a title I ever, in my wildest nightmares expected to have, but I am so grateful & fortunate that my family & I have the continued admirable support of Homicide Survivors Inc. Before anyone understands the beneficial impact that Homicide survivors has on those impacted by a homicide, it is imperative for me to tell my mother's story & my heartbreak.

I have yet to meet anyone that has a heart like my mom did, she was the epitome of a beautiful heart. Forgiveness, love, and compassion are all things that she embodied and expressed daily. In 2017, she met a monster that beat her for the first time as soon as they moved in together. She left him immediately but still forgave his actions. It was three months after their separation that he lured her to meet him. That is when he savagely took her life by brutally attacking her. She was left in his home for over a week while texting family pretending, he was her. Her body was so badly decomposed that we could not have her in a casket. We could not say goodbye, we could not see her to truly believe that she was really gone. The monster that did this to our family, the coward that savagely attacked this 120-pound tiny, beautiful woman was in hiding for an entire month. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was an understatement not only for me, but for every single one of my family members. My mother left behind (her life stolen from her) 4 children, 9 grandchildren, 10 siblings, and many nieces and nephews. Each one of us could not comprehend or understand this tragedy that traumatically took over.

I like to refer to Homicide Survivors as angels because in the darkest times of our life, they were one of the brightest lights that helped us crawl out of the confusing dark tunnel. I have never lost anyone in life, let alone to murder, a word that you think only happens in TV shows or movies. I was confused on the process, what to do, where to go, how to cope. I remember laying in bed crying, and what I thought was only hours, was actually days. Homicide Survivors came over, to my house, and I peeled myself up to speak with them as I had a million questions. My entire family gathered around Homicide Survivor staff (Sylvia & Becky) as they sat with us holding our hands explaining every step of the process and how to move forward. They helped us with the cost of the tombstone, the burial services, time missed from work. I am crying now thinking about how much of relief I felt for the first time with every word they expressed.

At that moment, feeling relief was not something that came easy as I was trying to be strong for my daughters, I was trying to piece together what happened, I was in shock hoping she would walk through the front door, and I was terrified of being murdered myself because the monster was still on the loose. I knew he was upset about me trying to keep my mother from going back to him and he would be upset that I was public speaking to any news station trying to ask for community help in his capture. Homicide Survivors helped create those speaking avenues to help find closure in his capture. They created flyers for us and worked with 88-crime for us. Suddenly, I did not feel fearful anymore because I knew we weren't alone. I knew we had an amazing team on our side understanding our perspective. I saw they understood the confusion on our faces on where to begin with burial services. I was grieving my mother, the last thing I thought about was financial issues on trying to get her services perfect since she was taken so horrifically. As I sit here with tears rolling down my cheek, words on this paper will never be able to fully express the loving impact that Homicide Survivors as had on our family. We are stronger because of

them. Until the act of murder is eradicated from our society, Homicide Survivors Inc. will always be needed in more ways than one.

October 20, 2021

To Whom it may concern:

I'm writing in support of **Homicide Survivors, Inc.** here in Tucson, Arizona because Friday, February 19, 2016 was the worst day of my life. I'll start with a little background information. In the summer of 2015, I ended a 3-year relationship with a man named Steve Leska. We had been living together in my home but I could no longer tolerate his heavy drinking and his constant legal battles with his ex-wife. Around Christmas time in 2015, I met a man named Jim Kozar and we started dating. Somehow Steve found out about Jim and started harassing me with numerous texts, intimidating phone calls and showing up unannounced at my home and church. So, in early February of 2016, I obtained an Order of Protection against Steve. Things really started to spiral out of control after that. He left a threatening note on my front door, sent threatening texts to my neighbor and sister, and was seen loitering in a wash area behind my home. Jim became very concerned and wanted to do something to secure the house with an alarm system because, he said, "That guy is going to do something"...

Well, that following Friday, February 19th, Steve did do something! As I was lying awake in bed at 4:30am, I saw the silhouette of a man entering my bedroom. Jim was there with me and I reached over him to turn on the lamp, and it was Steve! He immediately grabbed Jim out of bed and cut his throat. He then attacked me and started yelling and beating me. I saw Jim fall backwards on to the floor and he did not make a sound or move. I could not get away from Steve to help Jim, but when I saw all the blood on the floor, I knew Jim was severely wounded. Steve beat me and tried to tie me up but I fought with him and eventually was able to run from the bedroom to the other side of the house. After 4 hours of being held captive, beaten, and sexually assaulted, I was finally able to get to a window, jump outside and scream for help. Steve jumped out on top of me and began beating me on the head with a large rock. He would have killed me if it hadn't been for my neighbor who heard my screams and came to my rescue. The police showed up soon thereafter and Steve surrendered. I was taken to the emergency room where I waited all day waiting to be examined by a sexual assault nurse. Because I had so much blood on me, had no clothes and could not go home, some victim advocates arrived at the hospital and arranged for me and my family to go to a hotel. They also went shopping to get me some clothes. They were like angels that appeared out of nowhere and I had no idea how important people like them would become in my life over the next 2 years.

Needless to say, nothing like this had ever happened to me or anyone in my family or anyone I knew for that matter. I had no idea what would happen next. For several weeks I was in shock going through all the motions of Jim's funeral and trying to get therapy for myself before I could return to work. Some of the first advocates that reached out to me were from **the Homicide Survivors group**. They came to my home to talk to me about their services as well as the services provided by the Pima County Attorney's office victim services division. They gave me a lot of information, but at the time, I was in a fog and it didn't make much sense.

Later that summer, an advocate from the attorney's office called me to set up a time for me to meet with her and the prosecution attorneys so we could all get acquainted. An advocate from **Homicide Survivors** named Becky was also there at the meeting with me. When I met with them they were all very sympathetic to my

situation and made me feel at ease and that there was a good chance Steve would spend the rest of his life in prison.

In the mean-time, there had been some case management conferences being held at court and Steve was there. The advocates explained to me that I could go if I wanted to, but I certainly did not have to and that was a big relief. Instead, they would go for me and call me later to let me know what had transpired. I was so thankful that I didn't have to go and look at Steve. The months dragged on and there wasn't much said about a trial date. But when I started going to the monthly **Homicide Survivor** monthly support group meetings, I began to learn a lot about the court system from other survivors at the meetings. This was extremely helpful to me to get firsthand knowledge of all the things that would take place over the next year or longer before a trial was ever to take place.

In the fall of 2017, a trial date was finally set for March, 2018. In many ways, I was going to be their key witness because I was there that morning and had first-hand knowledge of what Steve had done. But they wanted to make sure I was ok with that. They were very respectful of how I felt and promised me they would help me prepare as the trial date got closer. They kept their word. A few weeks before the trial, Becky from **Homicide survivors** and an advocate from the attorney's office met with me to listen to my recorded interview with the Sheriff's office that had occurred just a few days after the crime. It was very emotional to listen to it and was also very long -- over an hour. But both advocates stayed in the room with me and gave me their support and attention. It was so helpful to have them there -- I could not have listened to that alone.

Most of my family lives in the Phoenix area and they wanted to come to the trial. The advocates gave us an opportunity to take a tour of the courtroom a few weeks before the trial. That was extremely helpful for my family to see and understand that this was not going to be like something on TV! Another event that was very helpful to me before the trial was to actually attend one of the case management conferences so I could see what Steve looked like and I wouldn't have to worry about seeing him for the first time on the first day of my trial. Me, my niece and Becky from **Homicide Survivors** went to one of the hearings. We sat in the back of the courtroom, but Steve saw us and stared at us the entire time. It was very strange and overwhelming to see him that way -- chained to other prisoners in an orange jumpsuit. But anger welled up in me -- anger at him for killing Jim and ruining so many lives, including his own -- and for what? I asked myself that question for a long time and sometimes still do.

The trial began in late March, 2018 and lasted for 5 days. It was very comforting for me to see Becky from **Homicide Survivors** and other advocates sitting with my family everyday in the courtroom, knowing they were there to support us. The jury began deliberations the day after the trial ended. The advocates placed us in a private family waiting room in the courthouse with Jim's family to wait for the verdict. We didn't have to wait long -- in less than 2 hours, the jury had their verdict. Steve was found guilty on all 11 felonies and the judge scheduled the sentencing hearing for May 14th.

The advocates met with me before the sentencing hearing help me write a victim's impact statement. It was something I was familiar with from my friends at the **Homicide Survivors** group meetings, and many of them actually came to the sentencing hearing to support me. The prosecution attorney stood right beside me while I

read my impact statement, and I felt all the love and support from the advocates and friends from **Homicide Survivors** in the courtroom. The judge sentenced Steve to life in prison with no parole along with several years from the other charges stacked on top.

Walking out of the courtroom that day, I nearly fainted. It was finally over. A great weight had been lifted. The black cloud over me was finally gone. The help and support I received from the **Homicide Survivors** advocates and the Pima County Attorney's office truly helped me and my family survive the years before the trial and the trial itself. I cannot imagine going through that time without them.

I continued to attend monthly **Homicide Survivors** support group meetings for a long time after the trial and also volunteered at some of their fundraising events such as the Locks for Love, and the 4th Ave street fair. I have also attended therapy yoga sessions that are sponsored by Homicide Survivors. When I have gone to support meetings and meet people early on in the process, I know I can help them by telling them my story and be there for them like others were for me. My hope is to continue to help others who have gone through the worst days in their lives because unfortunately, the violence continues every day and we must all do what we can to love and support each other. **An organization like Homicide Survivors, Inc. is an essential part of the Tucson community, especially with the recent rise in homicides. Their services, as I have explained, were such a great help to me and my family. I cannot imagine anyone having to go through what I did without their support.**

Sincerely,

Stacey LaBorde

Stacey LaBorde