



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Strong Women, Families, & Communities
Erin Murphy, Chair

One City Hall Square ◊ 5th Floor ◊ Boston, MA 02201 ◊ Phone: (617) 635-3040 ◊ Fax: (617) 635-4203

REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

February 7, 2024

Dear Councilors,

Docket #0138, Message and order authorizing the City of Boston to accept and expend the amount of One Hundred Forty-Six Thousand Eighty-Nine Dollars and Seventy Seven Cents (\$146,089.77) in the form of a grant for the FY23 Violence Against Women Act, a STOP Grant, awarded by the United States Department of Justice, passed through the MA Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, to be administered by the Police Department. The grant will fund a Civilian Domestic Violence Advocate who provides services for victims in Jamaica Plain, East Boston, and Charlestown, as well as overtime for all civilian domestic violence advocates citywide, was sponsored by the Administration and referred to the Committee on January 24, 2024.

Summary of Legislation:

This Docket authorizes the City to accept and expend \$146,089.77 in the form of a grant: *FY23 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) STOP Grant* awarded by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ), passed through the MA Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) to be administered by the Boston Police Department (BPD).

VAWA STOP grants are awarded to support efforts providing victims of Domestic Violence with protection and justice, as well as necessary and supportive resources/services.

This Docket declares that the *FY23 VAWA STOP Grant* would fund one (1) full-time civilian Domestic Violence Advocate (DVA) who would provide services for victims in Jamaica Plain, East Boston, and Charlestown, as well as overtime for all Civilian DVAs citywide.

Information Gathered at the Hearing:

The Committee held a hearing on Monday, February 5, 2024. The Chair was joined by Vice Chair, Councilor Liz Breadon; Council President Louijeune; Councilor Flynn; Councilor Weber; Councilor FitzGerald; Councilor Mejia; and Councilor Durkan.

Jenna Savage, the Deputy Director of the Office of Research and Development (the Office), a civilian-only office within BPD that applies for grant funding, testified on behalf of the

Administration. It was explained that the Office applies for grants to fund innovative evidence-based services beyond what the operating budget can cover. It was further explained that some grants are applied for annually, like Docket #0138, and that most grants the Department receives come through the DOJ, whereas other grants come from the State.

In total, the Administration stated that the Domestic Violence Unit (the Unit) has seven (7) DVAs. It was explained that two (2) DVAs on staff are funded by a different grant related to COVID-19 and will eventually need to find alternate funding to keep them on staff. The Administration explained that in years past, the other DVAs on staff were funded by the *VAWA STOP Grant* as well but are now funded through the operating budget.

Councilors asked the Administration what neighborhoods DVAs cover and how the Administration determined which neighborhoods were in need. The Administration explained that the DVAs cover most neighborhoods in the City except for parts of South End and Back Bay. Further, the Administration explained that the DVA covered under this year's grant is Spanish-speaking and will be placed in neighborhoods where there is a need for Spanish-speaking advocates.

Councilors also asked the Administration to describe what the DVA does on a day-to-day basis and who they help in the community. The Administration explained that typically, on a day-to-day basis, DVAs meet with clients, take walk-ins, go to the SJC, etc. It was stated that the DVA provides culturally linguistically competent services and helps with safety planning, understanding legal processes, etc. In terms of who they help, Councilors highlighted the Federal law, stating that it was designed, in part, to help immigrants who are victims come forward and report free from retaliation. The Administration acknowledged that civilian domestic violence advocates associated with the police may cause hesitancy for people with respect to reporting and seeking services, highlighting that victims are not always comfortable working with sworn officers, especially if they are undocumented. However, the Administration highlighted their partnerships with community organizations as a means to mitigate hesitant victims and survivors.

Councilors asked the Administration about community partnerships and encouraged the Administration to branch out and work with smaller grassroots organizations like Dominican Women's Development Corp. and Centro Presente.

Councilors also asked the Administration to describe the data the City is required to collect and report with respect to the Grant. The Administration explained that the Unit has a Domestic Violence Analyst who collects information on victims served, reporting data, partnerships, etc., and provides that data to EOPSS, which provides a report to the DOJ.

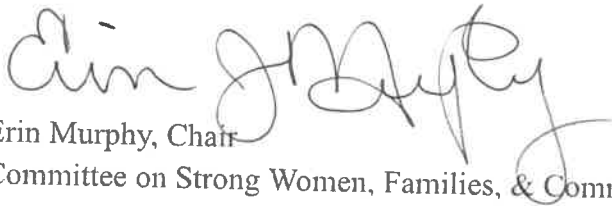
Finally, Councilors encouraged expanding the Unit to reach more residents like those in the South End area and discussed ways in which the Council could support the Unit through budget season.

Recommended Action:

The Chair of the Committee on Strong Women, Families, & Communities, to which the following was referred:

Docket #0138, Message and order authorizing the City of Boston to accept and expend the amount of One Hundred Forty-Six Thousand Eighty-Nine Dollars and Seventy Seven Cents (\$146,089.77) in the form of a grant for the FY23 Violence Against Women Act, a STOP Grant, awarded by the United States Department of Justice, passed through the MA Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, to be administered by the Police Department. The grant will fund a Civilian Domestic Violence Advocate who provides services for victims in Jamaica Plain, East Boston, and Charlestown, as well as overtime for all civilian domestic violence advocates citywide,

submits a report recommending that this docket **ought to pass**.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Erin Murphy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Erin Murphy, Chair
Committee on Strong Women, Families, & Communities