



THE MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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**JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND MASSACHUSETTS CAUCUS OF WOMEN
LEGISLATORS CO-HOST INFORMATIONAL HEARING HIGHLIGHTING
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE**

A drive for new policy solutions to end domestic violence in the Commonwealth

BOSTON –The Joint Committee on Public Health and the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators co-hosted an informational hearing today at the State House on the topic of domestic violence as a public health issue. The purpose of the hearing was to examine the prevalence of domestic violence in the Commonwealth, its impact on the health of Massachusetts residents, current efforts addressing the issue, and recommendations for future actions.

“Domestic violence is a serious public health problem that harms the health and livelihood of too many residents across the Commonwealth,” said Representative Kate Hogan (D-Stow), House Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health. “I hope that, using the information provided by testifiers at today’s hearing, we in the Legislature can determine how to enhance support for those working in prevention and response services and identify new policy initiatives to end domestic violence in Massachusetts.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [reported](#) in July 2017 that 55 percent of female homicides in the U.S. from 2003 to 2014 were related to intimate partner violence and in Massachusetts, using 2010-2012 data, the CDC [estimated](#) that over one in four women and one in ten men have experienced victimization by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Jane Doe Inc., Massachusetts’ statewide coalition against sexual and domestic violence, reported that between 2003 and 2012, 177 people in the Commonwealth were killed by their intimate partner, with 87 percent being female; additionally, 25 children of those affected by domestic violence also lost their lives during this period.

“Today’s hearing emphasized the importance of addressing domestic violence through a public health lens,” said Senator Jason Lewis (D-Winchester), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health. “We heard more evidence of how critical it is to do everything possible to prevent this type of violence from occurring in our communities.”

Seventeen experts testified at the hearing, representing a range of backgrounds including those personally affected by domestic violence, state and county officials, researchers, prevention and response experts, advocates, and service providers serving a variety of different constituencies.

In April 2015, Governor Charlie Baker signed Executive Order 563 elevating the Governor’s Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence and appointing Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito as Chair. Lieutenant Governor Polito was joined by Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders to testify at today’s hearing.

“The Baker-Polito Administration has been committed to introducing tools and reforms for policymakers,

providers, law enforcement, community organizations, survivor advocates and others to raise awareness, prevent violence and hold offenders accountable,” said Lieutenant Governor Polito. “As Chair of the Governor’s Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, we appreciate the Joint Committee on Public Health and Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators’ partnership on this issue and for hosting this informative discussion as the Commonwealth prioritizes all residents living a life free of fear and violence.”

Racial and ethnic minorities and low-income individuals are disproportionately affected by domestic violence. The U.S. Department of Justice [reported](#) that between 2003 and 2012, non-Hispanic Blacks and non-Hispanic multiracial individuals had higher rates of intimate partner violence (4.7 and 16.5 per 1,000 people, respectively) than non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic individuals of other races (3.9, 2.8, and 2.3 per 1,000 people, respectively). In addition, lack of financial resources [can](#) prevent victims from leaving abusive relationships, which may inordinately burden low-income individuals.

“A comprehensive public health approach to sexual and domestic violence must include both prevention and response, must be trauma informed and culturally responsive and inclusive” said Maureen Gallagher, Policy Director, Jane Doe Inc. “The work of JDI and our members has been driven by a public health perspective for many years and as the field has evolved, so have our perspectives. We often say ‘domestic violence can affect anyone’ and yet it does not affect everyone equally. If you are an immigrant, a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ/T community, a poor person, or a person with a disability, experiences of gender-based violence will impact you differently and create more barriers to safety.”

“We must continue to work together to elevate the voices of survivors of domestic violence and put an end to the suffering too many women, men and children are still facing in its wake,” said Senator Linda Dorcena Forry (D-Dorchester). “By empowering survivors to tell their stories, working with advocates and allies, we can help those who are still facing domestic violence. We must do better to empower members of marginalized groups, like our immigrant community, who may feel they will be punished for coming forward. They must know we are here to support them as they show the courage to come forward.”

On October 2nd the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Senate adopted a [joint resolution](#), which was introduced by Chairs Hogan and Lewis and co-signed by 133 other representatives and senators, recognizing October as “Domestic Violence Awareness Month” in the Commonwealth and affirming domestic violence as a threat to public health.

In addition to the oral testimony delivered during the informational hearing, the Joint Committee on Public Health is accepting all written testimony on this subject; testimony can be sent to Madison.Louis@mahouse.gov.

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The Joint Committee on Public Health considers all matters concerning the public health of the Commonwealth and other matters as referred.

The Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators was established in 1975 with a mission to enhance the economic status and equality of women and to encourage and support women in all levels of government.