

*Mainstream and  
LGBTQ DV  
Advocates  
and  
LGBTQ  
Anti-Violence  
Organizations*

*LGBTQ Domestic Violence  
Targeted Recommendation:*

Ensure that all referrals to 911 and law enforcement are informed, individual, and based on a reasonable expectation of benefit in the specific situation



National  
LGBTQ DV Capacity Building  
Learning Center

## *Recommendation: Ensure referrals to 911 and law enforcement are informed and based on expectation of benefit*

### Rationale

Nationally, domestic violence (DV) survivors cannot rely on consistent or helpful treatment from 911 and law enforcement responses. In a 2015 survey of domestic violence survivors, the National Domestic Violence Hotline found that 83% of respondents reported that their contact with law enforcement was either harmful or resulted in no benefit to them.<sup>i</sup> Additionally, 25% of DV survivors who participated in the survey said that they would not call 911 for assistance again no matter what.<sup>ii</sup> Law enforcement involvement in domestic violence cases often results in unwanted complications and increased harm to survivors of DV.<sup>iii</sup> In the hotline study, survivors across diverse identities expressed their dismay at treatment by police.

For LGBTQ survivors, harm resulting from law enforcement involvement is even more pronounced. The long and well-documented history of violence, sexual exploitation, and extortion by police against transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people has resulted in a well-founded reluctance of people in LGBTQ communities to access law enforcement. The arrest and prosecution of LGBTQ people (and particularly transgender people and people of color) negatively impact LGBTQ survivors' ability to get a job, keep custody of children, utilize public benefits in housing and assistance, get scholarships for higher education, be judged as credible when victims of crime, and exercise the right to vote. Such treatment involves a host of other collateral costs as well.

The role of advocates is not to change LGBTQ people's perception of law enforcement and prosecution. Rather, the field must take seriously the impacts of biased policing and prosecution against diverse survivors and their families, and integrate that understanding into day-to-day advocacy work. One way to do this is by eliminating default 911 referrals. Understanding the reality of the discrimination and bias that LGBTQ people experience at the hands of law enforcement means that advocates should actively discuss potential benefits and harms of police involvement when safety planning with survivors.

### Recommendations for Mainstream and LGBTQ DV Advocates and LGBTQ Anti Violence Organizations

1. Do not make referrals to law enforcement a default recommendation (for example, outgoing voicemail messages should *not* say, "Please hang up and call 911").
2. Make specific and informed referrals to law enforcement only when advocacy reveals that police involvement is likely to result in a net benefit to a survivor in a given situation.

3. Make referrals to trusted officers and detectives whenever possible, rather than referring a survivor to general dispatch.
4. Do not require police reports or law enforcement involvement as a condition of service.
5. Always consider racial, sexist, and class bias, criminalization of drug use or sex work, and other factors that may shape a survivor's treatment by the criminal legal system.
6. Be prepared to engage in systems advocacy on behalf of survivors.
7. Understand rights related to arrest and detention, and safety plan with survivors about what to do if they are arrested.

## Resources

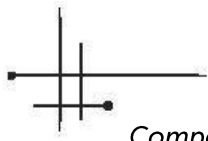
- [ACLU's Know Your Rights When Encountering Law Enforcement](#)
- [Who Will Help Me? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses](#)
- [Campaign Zero](#)

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<sup>i</sup> Logan, T. K. & Valente, R. (2015). *Who Will Help Me? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses*. Washington, DC: National Domestic Violence Hotline. Retrieved from <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/law-enforcement-responses>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.



### *Compensate LGBTQ Organizations*

One in a series of targeted recommendations from the LGBTQ Domestic Violence Capacity Building Learning Center intended to improve policy, research, intervention and prevention efforts regarding LGBTQ DV.

The LGBTQ DV CBLC is a project of the Northwest Network for Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse with foundational partner the National Coalition of Anti Violence Programs

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