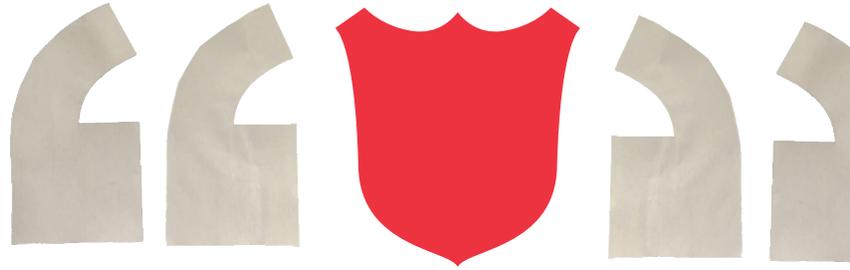




TRANSFORMING  
LIVES THROUGH  
JUSTICE



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **In Their Own Words:**

#### Domestic Violence Survivors on Seeking Safety & Police Responses

**Q. What is “In Their Own Words”?**

*In Their Own Words* is a policy brief, based on conversations with approximately 50 domestic violence survivors about their experiences with the police. The brief highlights the voices and experiences of survivors as to how police responses influence survivors’ next steps, such as accessing domestic violence services or restraining orders. The brief culminates in policy recommendations aimed towards more supportive police interactions with survivors.

**Q. What is Partners?**

Partners is a non-profit public interest law firm that is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of domestic violence and sexual assault victims through free legal representation, advice, and counseling sessions. To extend our impact, we also engage in advocacy, seeking systemic changes in the legal system to advance equity and safety, especially for marginalized survivors.

Partners provide free legal assistance to low-income victims who seek domestic violence and sexual assault restraining orders and orders of protection, as well as related relief available in the family court. Partners serves clients statewide, and provides legal representation in Essex, Hudson, Passaic, Union, and Middlesex Counties. Approximately 85% of Partners’ clients are people of color, and 35% are individuals with limited English proficiency.

**Q. Why did Partners conduct this study?**

Partners learned from prospective clients seeking services that many of them faced obstacles in obtaining restraining orders and learning about advocacy services when they sought help from law enforcement. Thus, Partners set out to find out exactly why this was the case and if police interactions influenced survivors’ next steps towards safety.

**Q. How was research for the study conducted?**

Partners interviewed approximately 50 survivors. The research team also conducted outreach to get input from community partners, such as organizations serving South Asian, Arabic, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ survivors.

**Q. What were some of the key findings of the study?**

The findings from the survivor interviews Partners conducted are organized around five primary themes:

- **hopes and fears in contacting law enforcement;**
- **confusion about access to services and restraining orders;**
- **perceived lack of adequate protection;**
- **perceived bias from the police; and**
- **informed and helpful police responses.**

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Some key findings include:

1. **Dismissiveness as a barrier to obtaining police assistance:** Nearly half of interview participants identified discouragement or dismissiveness within police interactions. Notably, the majority of survivors who reported feeling dismissed also reported bias within the police interaction.
2. **Police discouraging victims from seeking restraining orders:** While law enforcement are required to offer victims restraining orders, many survivors reported that the police discouraged them from obtaining restraining orders. Despite their police interaction, over 40% of the interviewed survivors received their restraining order from the Superior Court without assistance from the police.
3. **Victims feeling unprotected following law enforcement interactions:** Over half of the survivors we interviewed identified feeling unprotected by the police, defined as the police declining to initiate criminal charges, not serving a restraining order, or not responding to a report of contempt.
4. **Lack of access to Domestic Violence Advocates:** Police departments are required to work with a Domestic Violence Response Team, made up of trauma-informed, confidential subject matter experts, and to offer victims the opportunity to meet with an advocate. One quarter of survivors reported learning about advocacy services from law enforcement.
5. **Positive Police Responses:** Survivors outlined how an individualized, empathetic police response provided them with crucial assistance at a moment of intense danger and trauma. Although many participants had complaints regarding their interactions with the police, they acknowledged the essential role of law enforcement with over 60% of interviewees indicating that they would call the police again if they encountered another episode of violence.

## ***Q. What are the recommendations for change?***

The following recommendations, based on insights from survivors and community domestic violence agencies, envision enhanced support for survivors from advocates and social workers and improving techniques for communicating with survivors. The recommendations are divided into four sections:

1. Community Response
2. The Office of Attorney General and County Prosecutors
3. Law Enforcement and County Prosecutors
4. Legislative Measures

**Community Response** recommendations focus on providing county or municipal funding for social workers from the community to work in conjunction with law enforcement.

**The Office of Attorney General and County Prosecutors** recommendations call on New Jersey to address systemic barriers regarding restraining order services and develop more guidance for law enforcement to communicate with victims with limited English proficiency.

**Police Departments and County Prosecutors** recommendations include mandatory activation of domestic violence advocates, enhanced training, and prioritizing recruiting more female officers.

**Legislative Measures** recommendations focus on bills, such as Strengthening Domestic Violence Crisis Teams (A227) that would help ensure greater access to support and resources for survivors when they are seeking help and Translations of TROs and FROs (S1000/A1704) that would require the issuance of TROs and FROs in the primary language of the parties, in addition to English.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

***Q. When will the Study be available?***

The Study, comprised of four sections, will be available as of September 19, 2022.

**Part 1** outlines the process for conducting survivor interviews and summarizes past research to contextualize our study.

**Part 2** analyses of the duties of police in responding to domestic violence.

**Part 3** describes the concerns of survivors with regard to their law enforcement experiences and identifies factors in those interactions that build or diminish trust, safety, and assistance.

**Part 4** examines the implications for victims when the law enforcement response does not meet the needs of survivors and concludes with recommendations to better protect and serve survivors.

***Q. Where can I obtain a copy of the Study?***

The Study can be found on Partners' website (<https://partnersnj.org>).

***Q. What other research studies have been conducted by Partners?***

"The Impact of the COVID-19 Intensifies the Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence in New Jersey" conducted with Seton Hall Law School can be found [here](#).

***Q. Whom can I contact at Partners to obtain additional information about the Study?***

For further information regarding the Study, contact [InTheirOwnWords@partnersnj.org](mailto:InTheirOwnWords@partnersnj.org).

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