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DA Announces New Program Able to Locate Safe Shelter Space for Abuse Victims in Minutes

Online System Requests go to Shelter Network Comprised of 400 Beds

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan announced today that domestic violence survivors will no longer have to spend hours or days trying to find safe shelter under a new program that can locate available space within minutes. The SoCal Safe Shelter Collaborative leverages technology to more quickly connect survivors with available space in a shelter so abuse victims can expeditiously be removed from dangerous situations and begin receiving support services.



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So far, 25 organizations have signed on to the new program with additional groups joining each week. Trained staff from the organizations collect information from the survivor, such as whether they have minor children residing with them or if they have disabilities that need accommodation. The request is sent to an online network of organizations with nearly 400 safe shelter beds. Staff at the shelters respond as to whether they have availability. Previously, locating a shelter bed could take hours or even days. This will reduce the number of

calls a survivor will need to make to find an available shelter.

“Making calls to find a shelter or support may be especially difficult for victims living with their abusers during the ongoing pandemic,” said District Attorney Summer Stephan. “If they need safe shelter and are ready to leave, we need to be prepared to make that a smooth process. We never want to leave a victim on their own to make endless calls to locate shelter, or worse, to come up with no options.”

Locating an appropriate shelter is complicated since each shelter has varying requirements based on its

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funding. The SoCal Safe Shelter Collaborative program will track response times and seeks to narrow down the list of shelters with possible availability for the survivor within 30 minutes or less.

If no shelter matching to the survivor's needs has an opening, there is a SafeNight hotel app that many of the shelters can use to quickly fundraise for emergency hotel stays. Community members can support survivors by visiting [CA Against Slavery](#) and selecting an organization to fund emergency hotel stays using the app.

Finding available shelter beds for survivors of abuse and violence is even more challenging amid the COVID-19 pandemic because capacity has been reduced in order to space out families for social distancing. Some service organizations have had to close their doors altogether, providing support solely by phone or online. All the while, survivors may be at increased danger from their abusers while quarantined together.

"In our work to serve survivors of human trafficking, locating safe shelter is one of the greatest challenges faced by service providers," said Ginger Shaw of California Against Slavery. "We feel optimistic that this new program will make that process much faster and easier for survivors and the staff working to help them."

A few years ago, Ruth fled to San Diego County to get away from her abuser. "Finding shelter was really difficult," said Ruth, a domestic violence survivor. I had to call every day for 10 days at a certain time to check for space availability until I was finally able to get into a safe shelter. That entire time, I was feeling lost and alone, couch surfing, not knowing if my abuser would come find me. Each time I would call, I had to retell my story. I wish I had someone to assist me through that experience. Leaving was traumatic enough. It's so hard to think in the midst of a storm."

A collaborative planning team of criminal justice and social service providers have been working to launch the SoCal Safe Shelter Collaborative in San Diego County. The collaborative brings together staff from human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault organizations. They have also included new educational opportunities for the service organizations joining the SoCal Safer Shelter Collaborative to ensure everyone is trained to effectively serve survivors.

"It's so exciting to see domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual assault organizations all working together to improve service coordination for these survivors," said Susan Munsey of GenerateHope. "As a collective, we have used this as an important opportunity to engage our local service providers in cross training and to improve referral practices across the board."

The Safe Shelter Collaborative is a national program funded by the Office of Victims of Crime and other donors, and is operated by Caravan Studios, a division of TechSoup. The program is being coordinated locally by the San Diego Regional Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Advisory Council and the [San Diego Domestic Violence Council](#), the latter two of which the DA's Office has an active role in.

"We're honored to be working with these organizations in San Diego County supporting survivors. We know a safe night is a critical first step for survivors and that working with the Safe Shelter Collaborative makes a difference to those in need," said Marnie Webb, the CEO of Caravan Studios and TechSoup's Chief Community Impact Officer.

The DA's Office values protecting victims and preventing crime. "By reducing the number of calls a

survivor makes for shelter, we are hoping to mitigate re-traumatization by the system,” DA Stephan said. “Every time a survivor must re-tell their story, they are reliving that abuse.”

For a comprehensive list of local resources available during COVID-19, visit SanDiegoDA.com

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse or violence, trained staff are available to speak with you and can connect you to local resources (Confidential, 24/7):

- National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233 or chat online at www.thehotline.org
- National Human Trafficking Hotline, 1-800-373-7888 or text “HELP” or “INFO” to SMS 233733 or chat online at www.humantraffickinghotline.org
- National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-4673 or chat online at www.rainn.org

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County District Attorney’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.