



Acting DA Singas Proposes One-Stop Shop for Victims of Domestic Violence

Written by Long Island News & PRs | 02. June 2015

Mineola, NY - June 1, 2015 - Acting Nassau County District Attorney Madeline Singas has proposed and is working with regional and local governmental and non-governmental partners to create a comprehensive one-stop shop for domestic violence victims that would allow them to receive legal, health, financial and other services in one convenient location next to Nassau County courts, addressing many of the logistical issues that currently make it difficult for victims to get the help they need during domestic violence prosecutions.

"Four New York City boroughs and Westchester County have Family Justice Centers to serve as comprehensive one-stop shops for domestic violence victims, and it's time we provide Nassau County victims with these critical resources in the most efficient and effective way we can," Acting DA Singas said. "No victim of a crime should have to miss out on the services they need because government failed to coordinate resources, and that's why I've made the creation of Long Island's first Family Justice Center a priority. I'm grateful to County Executive Edward Mangano for his support and commitment to this important project, and I look forward to working with our government and community partners to ensure its success."

Nassau County Executive Edward P. Mangano stated, "I declared Family and domestic violence are public health emergencies that threaten the lives of children and other family members. Since taking office, my administration has worked tirelessly to reduce violence in our communities. The creation of a comprehensive one-stop shop is critical for domestic violence victims to receive assistance and obtain other resources they need to get help."

What is the problem?

Domestic violence victims can potentially require a very wide range of services to address their abuse. In addition to appearances in County or Supreme Court facilities, victims typically must also meet with prosecutors from the District Attorney's Office and detectives and other members of the Police Department. Victims may also require the services of government agencies and non-profit organizations providing legal assistance, physical and mental health care, emergency and long-term housing assistance, educational opportunity, employment assistance, financial counseling and other services designed to help provide safety and self-sufficiency to victims.

Right now, a domestic violence victim might have to travel to numerous locations across Nassau County to receive all of the above services. This combined task can be time-consuming, costly, inefficient and dangerous enough – due to the constraints on mobility that domestic violence victims are often subject to by their abusers – to make it difficult for many victims to get all the services they need.

What are the solutions?

In 2014, the Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CADV) and the Coalition Against Child Abuse & Neglect (CCAN) merged into one facility in Bethpage to form The Safe Center, which is also staffed by the District Attorney's Office and the Police Department. Other services provided at The Safe Center include crisis intervention; individual, child family counseling; legal advocacy; emergency and long-term housing assistance; educational programs; and referrals to other services.

A new, comprehensive Family Justice Center, using similar centers in New York City and Westchester as a model, Acting DA Singas said, would build upon the success of The Safe Center and not just expand services, but also put them all in one building adjacent to Nassau County Court, Supreme Court and Family Court, in Mineola within walking distance to major public transportation lines like the Long Island Rail Road. This 'one-stop shop,' which would include day care services for children so that parent victims can attend appointments, would allow victims to dramatically diminish the obstacles of cost, time, and risk of detection by abusers that victims currently face.

"A new Family Justice Center in Nassau County, using similar centers in neighboring counties as a model, would take the great work currently done at The Safe Center and expand it in both scope and scale, making it even easier for victims to get the help they need in one place near Nassau Courts," Acting DA Singas said.

What has been done so far?

Starting immediately after her swearing in to office in January, Acting DA Singas and her staff have conducted an extensive amount of research and site visits with Family Justice Centers in Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Westchester in order to build her proposal for Long Island's first such facility. She has met with County officials including County Executive Edward Mangano, New York City officials, and critical non-governmental partners such as The Safe Center and Hofstra Law School, and has also identified alternative funding sources, including federal grant and criminal asset forfeiture funding streams, to neutralize local taxpayer costs for the project. In the days and weeks ahead, Acting DA Singas and her staff will continue courting non-governmental service providers to commit to staffing the new Family Justice Center, whose success will rely upon the active participation of victim service providers.

What exactly would go into Long Island's first Family Justice Center?

As with the Family Justice Centers in New York City and Westchester, Long Island's first such facility would serve as an easily accessible, secure, one-stop shop where victims can find legal assistance, physical and mental health care services and referrals, emergency and long-term housing assistance, educational opportunity, employment assistance, financial counseling, child day care, and other services designed to help provide safety and self-sufficiency to victims of domestic violence, family violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking.

The Nassau Family Justice Center would be a public-private partnership, and has been proposed to be located at 400 County Seat Drive (the site of the current Nassau County Matrimonial Center), which is approximately one block from County and Supreme Courts, the District Attorney's Office, and the future site of the Nassau Family Court. The proposed location is within walking distance to the Mineola Long Island Rail Road and NICE Bus station, making accessibility for victims without access to a vehicle easier. The renovation of the Matrimonial Center building for its proposed transition into the Nassau Family Justice Center is expected to be completed in 2017, coinciding with the completion of the renovation of the new Nassau Family Court.

Current and potential governmental and non-governmental partners and service providers for the proposed Nassau Family Justice Center include, but are not limited to, the following. Discussions have already begun with some, and will begin soon with others:

- Nassau County District Attorney's Office
- Nassau County Executive's Office
- Nassau County Police Department
- Nassau County Department of Social Services
- Nassau County Probation Department
- Nassau County Department of Health
- Nassau County, Supreme & Family Courts
- Nassau University Medical Center
- Nassau County Bar Association
- The Safe Center LI
- EAC Network
- Family and Children's Association
- Hofstra University School of Law
- North Shore-LIJ Health System

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