



Stewardship REPORT

SPRING 2022 DONOR UPDATE

You Make Transformations Possible!

The past few weeks have been incredibly busy for our attorneys and legal advocates.

March is always the busiest month for them, with more calls to our Legal Line. We know that many victims stayed in violent homes over the holidays, in hopes of giving their children a happy holiday season. By March, these aspirations have passed, and the reality of financial abuse is mounting.

Thanks to you, free legal services are available to victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and sex trafficking.

At WEAVE, we center the victim in every decision.

Your generous support allows us to create this highly individualized response and ensures every victim can access services that are welcoming and respectful of their experiences.



Creating Safe Spaces

With your support, we have created a safe space for victims to share their experiences when they need legal assistance. Research shows that trauma impacts how a victim recalls a violent experience and their ability to process and discuss the situation.

We see this when a victim cannot recall every detail of an attack in chronological order. Victims of trauma require more time to tell their story and recall key events. Traditional legal settings are not helpful in this situation, and the extra time needed can create greater financial requirements for the victim.

Together, the attorney and victim create the best legal course of action for their needs. This means planning for longer consultations, allowing for needed breaks to protect a victim's emotional well-being, as recalling abuse can trigger a range of physical and emotional responses. Victims are not expected to recall

details in chronological order. Rather, the attorney takes notes and seeks clarification later.

The processes used by our legal department are rooted in respect. We respect that the victim is the expert of their experience and knows what's best.

Our attorneys and advocates educate victims about each option, along with the expected timelines. Our role is to communicate options and possible repercussions of each choice.

Throughout the legal process, the victim's safety is paramount in all discussions. We know that victims must make decisions with thought given to how a perpetrator will respond. This includes establishing an initial safety plan that addresses housing, children's school schedules, and the victim's workplace — using lethality assessments to determine risk to the victim.

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Navigating the Legal System

We often hear from victims after they've attempted to navigate the legal system on their own — unaware there is a free resource to help them. We hear from victims who spent time completing paperwork for a Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO) only to have the application rejected. The application for a DVRO can exceed 50 pages for a victim who shares children with the abuser.

Another issue we see is victims who lack the financial resources to obtain an attorney, which results in them attempting to navigate hearings alone. Often, the abuser will self-represent as well. This means that the abuser can question their victim in hearings — asking deeply personal questions in an attempt to embarrass or silence them.

Abusers take full advantage of these



situations. It's common for abusers to file unnecessary requests in an effort to force the victim to respond or to come to hearings where they cannot avoid the abuser. In other situations, abusers control the family resources, allowing them to hire an attorney but leaving the victim to navigate the legal system alone.

Once WEAVE begins representation of a client, all communications about their legal case must go through the WEAVE attorney. While we cannot stop an abuser from frivolous filings, representation by a WEAVE attorney can ensure that communications are directed to our offices, and we can ask the court to take steps that deter this kind of abuse.

Because our legal services are free, an abuser filing multiple motions doesn't create a financial burden for the victim. Just the presence of an attorney can typically stop the excessive filings. While a victim may still need to testify, a skilled attorney can quickly stop a self-represented abuser from harassing the victim on the stand.

Our attorneys or advocates also arrange to meet with victims prior to going to the courthouse or at an agreed upon location in the parking lot. This ensures the victim has a person with them when entering the building and who can intervene if the abuser attempts to approach them.

The Long-Term Commitment of Legal Services

Some people think our legal services are limited to filing Domestic Violence Restraining Orders (DVRO), but this is only one part of our comprehensive legal services program.

For victims of domestic violence, a DVRO is often the first step in the legal process. Victims who have children with the abuser must address custody and child support. Children benefit from access to both parents

as long as the relationship remains healthy. Too often, abusers manipulate the custody process and their children — pitting children against the victim parent, refusing to follow custody orders, threatening to not return children, or pressuring children to disclose where they are living even when it may be a confidential shelter.

Custody exchanges can be stressful and
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dangerous times for victims, as it often represents an opportunity for the abuser to harass and threaten the victim. WEAVE attorneys can help negotiate a reasonable custody order including requiring custody exchanges to go through a trusted third party. When there is evidence that children may be in danger with the abuser, our attorneys can advocate for supervised visitation.

Victims of domestic violence frequently experience financial abuse. This may mean they do not have access to the family's financial resources, they are unaware of assets and earnings of the partner, or the abuser has generated significant debt tied to the victim. With a skilled attorney knowledgeable about

financial abuse and domestic violence, a victim can get the information needed to properly divide assets, ensure that fraudulent debt is the responsibility of the abuser, and request reasonable financial support for the care of their children.

Victims married to their abuser face additional legal challenges in ending the marriage. Frivolous filings, delaying decisions, and hiding assets and earnings can leave victims frustrated. Free legal assistance from WEAVE can help victims safely end their marriage and ensure that victims receive fair division of property from the marriage, along with spousal support for victims who have been financially dependent.

Unique Legal Issues for Victims of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking victims face unique legal challenges.

These victims need to navigate the same restraining order and custody needs as domestic violence victims, and they are even more likely to be the victims of identity theft, fraud, or coerced debt. Victims leaving this situation have no cash resources and no credit to rely on to support themselves, and their trafficker often has all of their identifying information — making it easier for the trafficker to stalk them or continue impersonating them.

Trafficking victims often get caught in the criminal justice system and end up with convictions that can be huge barriers to employment and housing. These can include DUIs or drug charges because victims are forced to use or transport substances or because they self-medicate to cope with the violence they experience. Other convictions include petty theft (often because traffickers refuse to provide basic necessities like food, soap or clothing), fraud, or eviction records.

WEAVE supports victims navigating each of these legal hurdles. Beyond restraining orders, family law, and financial abuse, WEAVE can

also help trafficking survivors access a unique legal tool limited only to trafficking victims called vacatur.

A vacatur petition allows the victim to ask the court to erase entirely (vacate) their non-violent criminal convictions associated with the trafficking they experienced. Vacatur is more powerful than an expungement. Expungements seal a victim's criminal records for some purposes, but the records still exist and may appear on background checks or searches. If a vacatur petition is granted, the court directs its clerk and all law enforcement agencies to completely destroy all records of the conviction.

A successful vacatur petition can be the turning point that allows a trafficking victim to find a good, stable job or quality, safe housing. These are the bedrock of economic security and a pathway to healing for the victim. These processes are complicated, time consuming, and require a victim to relive in excruciating detail the trauma they have experienced. These victims need skilled, compassionate legal help that is available at no cost.

Legal Assistance for Sexual Assault Victims

Criminal sexual assault investigations can move at an excruciatingly slow pace. During that time, victims often feel in the dark or have questions about what is happening in the process. WEAVE's attorneys are available to answer questions and help victims understand what to expect as a case moves from report, to investigation, and hopefully prosecution.

Most sexual assault victims know their assailant and may face ongoing harassment from their attacker, but the relationship doesn't qualify for a Domestic Violence Restraining Order. In these situations, WEAVE's attorneys can help

the victim obtain a civil harassment restraining order to protect themselves.

Sexual assault victims are also entitled to specific employment and housing protections. WEAVE attorneys help victims advocate for appropriate accommodations from their employer, so they have time to attend interviews, court hearings, medical appointments, or counseling. Our attorneys can also assist victims with terminating leases if that location is associated with the assault.

Many victims do not know they have these protections, or they believe the prosecuting attorney in a criminal case will help them. WEAVE is a vital resource to victims, so they can get legal advice that is confidential and focused solely on what best supports the victim's needs.



You Support Survivors

Your partnership and commitment to survivors is evident in the high quality legal services we can provide to survivors with your support.

WEAVE must raise more than \$250,000 each year to fill the gap that grants do not fund, in order to just meet current demand. It is only with your help that we can supply this comprehensive legal assistance for free and in a manner that truly meets the needs of our community — victim-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive. We are grateful for you and your support ... and the transformations it makes possible.



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OUR MISSION is to promote safe and healthy relationships and support survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and sex trafficking.