

DARYL FOX: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's webinar, OVC FY 2022 Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act State-Run Hate Crime Reporting Hotlines, hosted by the Office for Victims of Crime. At this time, it's my pleasure to introduce Katherine Darke Schmitt, Principal Deputy Director with the Office for Victims of Crime for some welcome remarks and to begin the presentation. Katherine?

KATHERINE DARKE SCHMITT: Thank you very much, Daryl. And to our participants, we are so glad to have you with us to have this conversation about the State-Run Hate Crime Reporting Hotlines Program. OVC does pre-application webinars for almost all of its competitive grant programs. If you have participated in one of those before, this is not that webinar. We have prerecorded a detailed webinar with instructions for how to submit an application to OVC, and we're going to put the link to that prerecorded webinar into the chat, so if you need technical details, you can find that support. I'm so happy that we have a number of hotline experts with us today. And so what we're actually going to be able to do with the time we have together to--today is talk substantively about what the challenges are in running hotlines and what this public safety benefits are that they provide. I am going to do a very high level overview of the solicitation so that you have the context for listening to our experts who join me in this panel, slightly later in the hour. Next slide please, Daryl.

Most important, I want to make sure that we are communicating clearly about the timeline. If you have applied for an Office of Justice Programs grant within the past 2 years, then you know that we now have a two-phase submission system. So the first phase, which--for this program, is due Tuesday, November 1st. You create a skeletal sort of application in grants.gov. For that part of the application, you need very little information. Some information about your organization, you need to know what solicitation that you are applying for. After November 1st, after you have successfully submitted the beginning of your application in grants.gov, the full application is submitted in JustGrants, and that is due on Tuesday, November 8, 2022. So please keep that timeline in mind. We expect we will be making grants in the late winter of 2023 and that these projects funded under this program will begin in March 2023. Next slide please, Daryl.

This program was authorized under the Jabara-Heyer Act, and as such, it has very specific eligibility requirements, which were part of the authorizing statute. So these grants will be made to state governments. OVC encourages state government agencies to work in partnership with community organizations and victim service providers who can support a state effort to do this kind of work. As such, these kinds of organizations, community-based organizations, victim services organizations are eligible to be subgrantees under this program but the prime applicant must be a state agency. Thank you, Daryl. Next slide.

We're going to put the link to the full solicitation document up in the chat for you so you can review all of the program requirements. I wanted to hit just some highlights for you. So this hotline will direct victims of hate crime to law enforcement and reporting mechanisms, if appropriate, and also to local victim support services. And the Jabara-

Heyer Act set out some other requirements for this program, and they are listed on this slide and the following slide. First, the Jabara-Heyer Act requires that personally identifiable information be handled in very specific ways that protect the confidentiality of the persons that use the hotline. And these details are spelled out in the solicitation document. Next slide please, Daryl.

It also requires that staff members who provide services over the hotline have certain bodies of expertise and certain skillsets in order to do their jobs. And, finally, the act requires that the hotline be accessible to people who need hotline services in languages other than English and individuals with disabilities. Thank you, Daryl. Next slide.

Outlined in the solicitation are several objectives for the program and they have to do with how state agencies and partner organizations collaborate in order to develop and provide services. There is also a requirement that some strategic planning be done and that there be a communications plan to make sure that the geographic area to be served is aware of the services that are being provided with this grant. Next slide, Daryl.

As I mentioned right at the top, we have an hour-long webinar, prerecorded and ready to go for you, that walks you through step-by-step exactly how you apply for a grant using that two-phase process that I described at the beginning. So please take advantage of that, if you are new to applying to OVC grants, because that will address many of the mechanical kinds of questions that you might have as you prepare to submit an application. Next slide.

And here is, again, that two-phase application process with its dates, because we don't want anyone to miss this opportunity because they don't understand the dates. The first part of the submission, which is really a relatively light lift, is due November 1, 2022. The full application is due November 8, 2022. And notice, please that if you do not initiate the grants.gov process on or before November 1st, you will not be able to submit an application. It will not be physically possible, if you have not first created that portal for yourself in grants.gov.

We're going to put up one last slide here, which has some contact information for technical assistance. You can see the top line is for the first part of the application process, the grants.gov helpline. The second part is for the second part of the application phase, the JustGrants part of this. And then, of course, we have at the bottom listed the OJP Response Center, who is available to answer other kinds of questions about preparing and submitting an application. We are going to make these slides available on the website so you will have them, if you need them.

So thank you very much for your attention to that brief and relatively pedantic introduction to this very important subject. We are now, fortunately, going to hear from experts who do this work on a regular basis to talk you through some of the considerations in planning and implementing a state-run hotline. And we have the honor and pleasure of being joined by one of my Department of Justice colleagues, Melissa Milam. She is the Victim Services Program Manager of the Civil Rights Division,

Criminal Section. Melissa has 25 years of experience advocating for justice and has-- including spending 7 years working as a Juvenile Probation Counselor at the local level, 11 years as a Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Victim Advocate with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, DC. Melissa, we are so grateful to have you here to talk about the victim-facing work that you have done over the course of your career. Please, take it away.

MELISSA MILAM: Thank you so much, Katherine, and thank you, Silvia, as well for organizing this important forum and allowing me the opportunity to speak today about my time as a Victim Survivor Advocate in the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section. And hello to everyone who's on the call. It's very nice to be able to talk with you today.

So in preparation for my time with you today, I, you know, started to do a little bit of recollecting. And over my almost 19 years of working directly with survivors here at the Department of Justice, I tried to estimate. And I kind of estimated that I've had over probably 25,000 conversations with survivors of crime. And of these, at least, 100 have been classified as federal hate crimes. While this figure may seem kind of small, I actually believe that this reflects something else. I believe it reveals less about the number of survivors and more about the difficulties and obstacles that they face when trying to report their experiences.

I've had countless conversations that have revealed as much, but I think a story that was shared with me recently, will best illustrate what I've learned in this work. Robert, whose name I've changed for the purposes of this conversation, is a survivor from one of the hate crime cases that was ultimately prosecuted by the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section. He had been beaten, robbed, and sexually assaulted by men who had targeted him for being gay. It was a brave thing for him to try to report these crimes, and, to me, it would have been understandable if he had kept what happened to him to himself and tried to forget. Regrettably, it was only after approaching three different law enforcement entities that he found a receptive audience. He was finally able to share his story, and after some overdue investigation, it was revealed that his attack was actually part of a much larger pattern; a pattern that involved many other survivors and an organized group of perpetrators. Finally, after navigating this and what can be an opaque process of prosecution, he was offered, at least, the closure of legal justice.

So I say all of that to say that Robert's case clearly illuminates a gap, you know, a blind spot, an area of need, but it also illuminates an opportunity here to be seized. He was possessed of an uncommon tenacity and was able to overcome gaps in services that he encountered. Surviving a hate crime will test even the most formidable resolve. With the right intervention, I believe we can support those survivors whose determination has been tested to the degree their crime might go unreported.

In Robert's case and in others, I have routinely imagined a resource that would respond to the questions that often go unanswered and the needs that go unmet for people like him. This is why being invited to speak with you today is very exciting for me. I know

that someone among you has the capacity to reimagine the traditional hotline and create a resource that can meet these needs and answer these questions.

I can imagine a survivor like Robert calling a central resource that--rather than reflexively tell him he is calling the wrong place, will effectively help him report his case to the appropriate agency. I can also imagine, with a very warm heart, a specialist listening to him with a highly trained ear, sparing him the re-traumatization of recounting his story repeatedly, because they are prepared to assess his needs and find the appropriate agency for his report. I imagine someone from this resource helping Robert navigate a difficult and intimidating process of participating in a prosecution in a humanistic way, informing him at every turn what to expect, and supporting him along the way. I can imagine this resource existing at the center of a constellation of other community and government resources, each standing at the ready to report and guide--I'm sorry.--to support and guide Robert as he recovers from his ordeal.

In the meantime, we at the Civil Rights Division will continue to do the work of assisting the survivors of hate crimes and ushering them through this difficult and obscure path towards justice. But while we do so, I will anxiously await your work creating this resource that we are all here to discuss today. It's a difficult thing to do this on behalf of survivors and it is not the work of one agency alone. I really believe we're most effective, as a community, working together, we are at our very best. I very much appreciate your time today and I thank you for listening.

Before I go, I would like to turn--well, I should say, before I turn this over to the wonderful panelists here to offer perspectives on the important work they're doing in their communities, I'll leave you with a recording, which includes a montage of remarks by hate crime survivors. This is a 2-minute video. And while it's a beautiful example of people's resilience and strength, it does have graphic discussions of specific personal experiences with violence as a result of hate. I want to acknowledge that each of us, each of you on this call has your own unique life experiences and to please engage in self-care as you watch it or consider stepping away and returning after it's over. Thank you again.

[VIDEO PLAYS. Confronting Hate: Strategies for Prevention, Accountability, and Justice.]

DAWN COLLINS: Our son was murdered by a White supremacist extremist.

RAMI JABARA: A few months before we got married, actually, when he ran over my mother while she was just walking as she normally did every day in her neighborhood.

SUSAN BRO: I did not get to grieve until that Christmas and then I had set it down again to get back to work. We were fortunate enough to have the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act, which is basically, hate crime accountability.

RAMI JABARA: And three months later, he shot and killed our brother, and right in front of my parents' house.

RICHARD COLLINS: There's some speech that are threats and like [INDISTINCT] said, I'm not a lawyer either, but a threat is a threat.

VICTORIA JABARA: If we couldn't have saved Khalid or Khalid couldn't have been saved, you know, what chance do other families have who are suffering?

DAWN COLLINS: Needless to say, when that incident occurred, it changed our lives forever.

SUSAN BRO: People have to work hard to not understand hate crime basically. The information is there and in plain view. It's no longer hiding in the dark.  
[VIDEO ENDS.]

KATHERINE DARKE SCHMITT: Melissa, thank you very much for the remarks you made and for sharing that Civil Rights video with us.

We are very fortunate that we actually are able to bring you today a panel of people who have expertise in doing exactly the kind of work that this OVC program contemplates. I am very pleased to introduce these panelists to you. They will spend the remainder of the webinar talking about their own experiences in setting up, and implementing, and sustaining the work of a hate--of a hotline.

We are going to begin with a quick video that comes from the National Domestic Violence Hotline. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, obviously does not focus on hate crime per se, but they do have a lot of experience in what it takes to run a hotline, and they have offered a short video with their perspective on what some of the critical elements of implementing a hotline involve. So we're going to watch that and then I will introduce the panelists. Thank you.

[VIDEO PLAYS.]

SALA FUCHS: Hi, everyone. I am so pleased to speak to you today on the important role hotlines can play in the response to crisis issues like domestic violence, human trafficking, mental health, and hate crimes. I am Sala Fuchs, the Chief Operations Officer at the National Domestic Violence Hotline. The hotline is the only 24/7 national hotline offering live advocate services to those impacted by relationship abuse in the U.S. We have answered more than 6.4 million calls, chats, and texts, since our inception in 1996. I am excited for possible state hotlines through this amazing opportunity from OVC to support those impacted by hate crimes.

There are a few things to consider when you are thinking about operating a hotline, and I would like to share those with you.

Number one, a response model. It is important to fully define your services. Defining the core support and services your hotline will provide is essential. For example, will your hotline offer validation and a quick connection to local resources or will you have a more

substantial model that includes personalized safety plans? As you design your services model, you should also consider how staff will be trained. At the Hotline, we have a training team, who have developed a curriculum specifically designed to support those experiencing relationship abuse.

Number two, a database. Developing a database of resources and providers used for referrals is one of the most important element in establishing operations. Ensuring culturally specific resources and alternatives to law enforcement are vital for providing support. At the Hotline, we have a database of nearly 5,000 providers and resources and we also have a staff dedicated to ensuring the database is kept up-to-date.

Number three, IT infrastructure and data collection. IT infrastructure is also critical. For example, what platforms will meet your long-term needs? Will you choose a cloud-based solution? What data will you want to collect? And how will you collect and store the data? Do you plan to provide services confidentially? If so, you will need to ensure that all personally identifying information is removed. Having partners with experience in contact center technology can be very helpful in formulating what is right for your organization.

And, number four, staffing. Most important is your hotline direct services team. They will be the heart of your organization. It is important to ensure that you are hiring caring staff who can demonstrate empathy and nonjudgmental support to people with diverse lived experience. Being upfront about the challenges of this work and the impact that secondary trauma can have is key in hiring and retention.

Number five, well-being. Finally, consider how you will address the well-being of all of your staff, but especially those on the frontlines. Developing a thorough well-being support program for your team will mitigate the impact of secondary trauma and burnout.

Thank you for the opportunity to share a little of what we have learned at the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Good luck in your pursuit of a state hotline and know that this work truly saves lives and enables people to pursue a path to safety. Thank you. [VIDEO ENDS.]

KATHERINE DARKE SCHMITT: We are very grateful to our friends at the National Domestic Violence Hotline for providing those words of advice for us.

I'm now pleased to invite--to introduce to you my DOJ colleague Silvia Torres. Silvia is a Victim Justice Program Specialist with the Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime, a position she has held since January 2016. Her experience includes project management, evaluation, and administration of private and federal grants. Silvia represents OVC on the DOJ Interagency Hate Crimes and Anti-Bias Working Group and oversees OVC's anti-hate crime portfolio.

Joining Silvia are four experts who are already engaged in the kind of work that you are contemplating. Terri Villa-McDowell is the Project Coordinator for the LA vs. Hate Program, a county-wide initiative of the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations to protect vulnerable communities targeted for hate acts and bullying in schools. Terri has been an appointed member to the California Department of Education Superintendent's Student Mental Health Policy Workgroup since 2015, helping develop policies to bring needed mental health services to California's children.

Catalina Blanco Buitrago has been the Assistant District Attorney with the Westchester County New York District Attorney's Office since September 2013. She is currently assigned to the Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau within the Trials and Investigations Division where she also serves as the Hate and Bias Crimes Coordinator.

Her colleague, Cristina Alston, has been a Crime Analyst with Westchester County since December 2018, also assigned to the Trials and Investigations Division. Cristina was recently assigned to the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Program after their office was awarded a grant from the Department of Justice to undertake that work.

Fay Stetz-Waters is the Civil Rights and Social Justice Director for the Oregon Department of Justice. As the Director of Civil Rights and Social Justice, she is committed to increasing the department's impact on civil rights issues affecting marginal and vulnerable Oregonians.

Thank you, all of you, for being part of this panel. And, Silvia, I turn the floor over to you.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you, Catalina--Katherine. Good morning, everybody. Let's begin by telling us, each of the panelists, by telling us a little bit about your hotline and also sharing your thoughts as to what effect do you feel hotlines have on building community safety. Let us begin by Cristina.

CRISTINA ALSTON: Hello. So the Westchester County District Attorney's Office serves Westchester County, New York and we're--we border The Bronx, which--so we are not too far from New York City. We have approximately 45 police departments in our county, if we include the local police departments as well as the county police and the New York State Police. And we have a multilingual hotline. So our hotline is available in five languages, which include English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, and Korean, but callers can leave a message in any of the hot--in any of--in any language and we will use our language hotline to interpret the call and to respond to the caller. Our hotline also is not exclusive to hate. Hate and bias is just one of the six options that someone can select on the hotline, which Catalina will get into a little bit later. And when we receive calls in the hotline, we get a variety of calls but most often we're getting calls regarding graffiti or harassment, and oftentimes it's from callers who are not comfortable with or who have--or are unhappy with the police response. And between last year and this year, when our hotline was relaunched last year as a multilingual hotline in March of

2021, we received approximately 50 calls per year. And Catalina will continue to talk about the community effect.

CATALINA BLANCO BUITRAGO: Hi, everyone. Nice to be here. Thank you for having us.

So we have found--and to Silvia's question about the effects on community safety, we have found that the hotline has helped us build better community relations and in turn, has helped our community feel safer. This is because the hotline provides members of our community, who may not otherwise feel empowered to go to the police or to report incidents or crimes involving hate and bias, an alternative route to make these reports. It also has increased the accessibility to the district attorney's office, making us almost more human in the eyes of our community by providing community members a single number so that they don't have to worry about whether they're calling the right person or if the complaint is being left in the right location. It's one number. Where we, as Cristina said, are able to take calls and reports of crimes and incidents in five languages that our hotline is in, but also in any language.

One of the major components of our hotline that has really helped us increase our community relations and make them better is that our hotline is not only for crimes but also incidents. We respond to crimes and incidents as well. We investigate both, so that--our hope is that by investigating incidents and addressing the underlying issues that cause bias incidents to occur, we're able to prevent hate crimes in the future. Our hotline is very much investigative-focused since we are a district attorney's office, but we--in addition to doing our investigative work, we also assist in connecting victims with resources that may be helpful to them in dealing with whatever incident they either witnessed or were victims of.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you both.

And, Terri, could you please share information about your hotline and answer the same question?

TERRI MCDOWELL: Sure. Good morning, everybody. Thank you for having me. So Los Angeles County started an anti-hate initiative. A part of that initiative was a hate reporting line. And our hate reporting line is very much operated by a nonprofit because we recognize right now government is so feared, mistrusted. So we went to 211 LA, a nonprofit that's been around for 20 years. They have a very large number of resources. They have caring, empathetic staff. We use a team approach in responding to both hate incidents and hate crimes, because like Westchester County, we very much see addressing hate incidents as preventing hate crimes in the future. Our response is also inclusive of community-based organizations. So a very important part of our hate line is a network of trusted agencies that victims will then be referred to for additional help. So, our hate line is open 24/7. We have access in 140 languages. Plus, our partnerships with the Asian American-serving organizations provide in-language support in the major Asian languages.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you. Very comprehensive.

Fay, can you tell us about your hotline and also, answer you know, your thoughts on the same question?

FAY STETZ-WATERS: Thank you, Silvia. The Oregon Department of Justice lifted up a bias response hotline in January of 2020. We operate a statewide trauma-informed, victim-centered hotline providing culturally specific referrals to people reporting hate crimes and bias incidents, based on their perceived membership in a protected class. Protected classes include race, color, disability, religion, national origin, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Our hotline is answered live by our multilingual staff through normal business hours, including lunch, Monday through Friday. For staff who are stationed around the state, they provide a confidential--it's a confidential service where we're focused on the victim, the victim's perception of the incident or the crime, the victim's needs in the aftermath of hate bias.

So, we provide what we call informed consent, which are the limits of our service. We do not have authority to investigate like some of the hotlines represented on the call today. We are a state agency subject to mandatory reporting requirements involving child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse of people with disabilities. So, we disclose that.

We also don't interfere with the attorney-client relationship. So, if someone is represented by an attorney, we make sure that we get a consent from the attorney for them to be able to proceed with our services.

Then in a very trauma-informed way, we obtain the information about the nature of the incident or the crime. If safety planning is needed, then we will--we will provide safety planning or resources, reporting options. If a victim wants to report to law enforcement, we can assist them with that. Whatever they want, we put victims in the driver seat so they can share on their timeline and call as often as they need.

Our call volume, we lifted this hotline up in 2020. We had 1,101 reports that year. The second year in 2021, 1,653 reports. And this year, we're well over 2,000 reports already. So, it's been going up every year.

And generally, what's reported to us is more bias incidents than bias crimes. But I will say the data shows that when bias crimes are reported, the anti-Black and anti-Asian criminal attacks are more violent.

The top types of conduct that are recorded are harassment, institutional bias, which we define as a system-wide bias, meaning excluding people, using offensive language, degrading language or discriminatory conduct by a public or private sector organization resulting in a loss of economic, social, or political resources. And then vandalism and assault are, kind of, neck and neck for the third highest.

In terms of whether a hotline to help the community feel safer, like I said, we focus on the victim. We have--we have already helped 2,000 victims already. And assistance can look very different, depending on what the victim's needs are. It can be things like crisis support or crisis intervention, individual advocacy, information about crime victims' rights, the criminal justice system. A lot of people call and don't know where to call, don't understand the system. So, we explain, give them an idea of what to expect. We do safety planning. We help with civil protective orders. We have a crime victims' compensation plan, as well as emergency financial assistance to help people relocate or improve their security, if that's what they need. When we get back out in the real world, we are able to accompany folks to the police department, if that's what they want to report, or to the prosecutor's office, or--and we even help with transportation.

So, we collect data. So, there's a trail of where incidents are happening. We put it on a map. This information is available publicly so law enforcement can go in and look at that map and find out. And the public can go look at that map, click on their own county and find out what type of things have been happening in their community. You could find that at [standagainsthate.oregon.gov](http://standagainsthate.oregon.gov). We've never had this kind of snapshot before.

When we get a community event like a anti--a hate event impacting the whole community like these anti-Semitic fliers that get distributed, we partner with law enforcement, higher ed, and community-based organizations and hold a community conversation and share space with those impacted by hate, so we can answer questions, we can listen, we can address fears and concerns. And then we have an education program and share resources. So, we've had it--done a couple of these this year already. We were able to do it during COVID. And, you know, we use kind of four tenets, from hate and harm. We try to help and heal. So, our focus is to assist the victim and let them know that they're not alone.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you, Fay. Wow. It's so interesting to see, you know, the different types of hotlines that can be created. Ultimately, the same goal, helping the victims of hate crimes. Thank you for your answers.

And now, could you share some of the strategies to create that hotline based on your experiences? Terri, would you start us with that question, please?

TERRI MCDOWELL: Sure. We took about a year to plan. And some of the--all of the elements that the Domestic Violence National Hotline addressed, we didn't realize we were checking them off but in fact, we were. We wanted to make sure that we had data because our resources are so limited for a very large county. So, we wanted to make sure that when the reports came in and the data showed the type of hate that was happening that we could respond. Three years later, we're using that data to drive policy changes.

We wanted to make sure we had infrastructure. So, that's why we went to a nonprofit that had longstanding experience. They have a proprietary software system that collects all of the case management notes. So, I told you earlier that we have a network of

partners. So, everybody is putting in their notes to make sure that no one falls between the cracks. So, like Oregon, we very much feel that once they report to the hate line, it's our responsibility to make sure that they are on the path to healing.

We also wanted to make sure that our staff, which had never been involved in responding to hate, had the cultural proficiency to make sure that they could speak without re-traumatizing victims who are coming from all different cultures, races, than their own. So, we have never stopped training our staff. We've never stopped training ourselves. So, we have representatives from different religions, different cultural groups, different gender identity. The changes around--the language around transsexual changes, we've always tried to stay on top of language, neighborhoods, and communities.

The other thing that we have moved to in--as a part of our strategy is a team approach. So, once a week, we will sit and we will discuss the most egregious cases. We bring in legal minds, case management, social workers, mental health professionals, policy activists to try to address each person's harm. And some of those cases, they keep--they keep me up at night.

The place that we have also gone to for responding to hate incidents is--Because the penal code covers victim compensation services here in California, they don't really have anything for victims of hate incidents. So, as we have gone along, we have made sure to include the state statutes that California has. So, California has very strong civil rights statutes. And we have now become very adept at making sure that those victims are linked up to the Unruh Act and the Bane Act. And we've been able to help victims through early investigation, through mediation, and through settlement. So that really sends a message to the community that, A, they can get help, even if it's a hate incident and not a hate crime. And B, it sends a message to businesses and other public places that they really need to safeguard customers and ensure that employees are trained well, so that when hate happens, they don't just, you know, do nothing.

So, that took a bit of time. And we are very, very happy to share lessons learned with whoever calls. So, we get calls a lot. And I really want to inform the group that if they would like to reach out and have a talk, we are very happy to help, unless it goes against your proposal. I hope I didn't just step in something.

SILVIA TORRES: Not at all.

TERRI MCDOWELL: Oops.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you, Terri.

Fay?

FAY STETZ-WATERS: Well, we had a legislative change, which was the impetus for our change in the law and the birth of our hotline. It started with our Attorney General

really being focused on what was an increase in really violent, racially motivated crimes. And she conducted a statewide listening session, really listened to what the victims were saying and learned that the bias incidents were not being really responded to. They were being dismissed by law enforcement as trivial, as free speech, and a number of other things. And so she formed a task force to kind of study the law, make recommendations--make recommendations to change it, update it, improve it with a focus on the bias victim. And that's how we got our hotline. The statute requires that we run a statewide trauma-informed, victim-centered hotline, provide these culturally specific referrals to qualifying local victim services. We get to define, Department of Justice got to define what that meant, qualifying local victim services. We--it lays out the protection, protected classes that are covered by statute. Our research is--Our data is showing that we may have to expand those coverage, you know, with the increase of our seniors getting assaulted and different groups getting assaulted that weren't--hadn't been contemplated in the statute initially.

We also collect data. We have a requirement now that law enforcement must refer a bias incident victim to our hotline or to a local qualifying victim service, because that wasn't happening.

We have a research partner, a state agency who helps us with our data called the Criminal Justice Commission. They analyze our data and they make recommendations for us in an annual report.

Now, at the time that this bill passed, I was the only one working in a civil rights unit. And so, it was in the summertime. And in Oregon, everyone goes away in the summertime. So, we had 6 months to get this hotline up and running. And so, you know, in the fall of 20--in--of 2019, we met frequently, raised a steering committee from prosecutors, law enforcement, mental health experts. We work with community-based organization leadership or--and those types of organizations to help bring, you know, greatest minds together to figure out what this work was going to look like. We did look at other models, the DV model in terms of a hotline. We had a mental health professional who helped us with our trauma-informed models and processes. We had law enforcement on board to help us with police bulletins and law enforcement tools and resource cards for those folks. We had disability advocates to help us with accessibility and identify those common knowledge--languages to make sure we had access for deaf and hard of hearing populations. We got to write administrative rules, fun stuff like that.

Then the data collection was a whole another landmine. And, we had to have a classification system. We found one with the Vera Institute, the Bias Crime Assessment Tool. We used that because it is focused on the victim. And we had to think about confidentiality, make sure we didn't share personally identifying information. So, we did a lot of things.

But making sure we had money for publicity to advertise our hotline, we could have done better about that because it came out in 2020. COVID came out in 2020. And our PSA, our Public Service Announcement, on TV and radio and Internet really got buried.

So, we had to do a lot of work on the back end to really educate people and make--increase awareness. We have a website presence.

And we make sure that our staff are well-trained. We were lucky enough to get advocates who have this background, who have legal background, who have worked within the systems and understand how to support folks who have been victims of crime. We were specifically looking for multilingual advocates and folks who had this kind of expertise. We were really lucky to be able to recruit and obtain these folks.

Money for training, money for the types of programs and needs that victims may have and try to anticipate those. So, we--initially we didn't have an emergency fund. We didn't have money for training. We didn't have money for translation. We didn't have money for technology. But we were lucky to be able to go back to the legislature and ask for these things that we needed. That was the beauty of having the data to support those things too.

SILVIA TORRES: Awesome. Awesome suggestions and strategies.

And, Catalina and Cristina, can you share your opinions on that?

CATALINA BLANCO BUITRAGO: Of course. So, our hotline came to be after our district attorney was elected. She was elected in 2020. The hotline went live for the first time, as Cristina mentioned, in March of 2021. So, it took us a little bit to get it running. But in order to help our hotline have the best chance at success, we did a couple of things.

So, the first thing that we did was we chose a number that was easy to remember. Our hotline--the area code is our county area code. The next three numbers are the three numbers that every county phone number begins with. And then the last four is T-I-P-S, TIPS. So, that's a very easy to remember number for the community.

We also phased out--or excuse me. We released our hotline in the five most popular languages or five popular languages in Westchester County. And I think Cristina mentioned this as well, English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, and Korean. We're hoping to be able to roll out additional languages as time goes and as we see a need for it.

It's also not exclusive to hate crimes. It has our most commonly requested categories for leaving tips in Westchester. So, we have elder abuse, hate and bias, immigration fraud, labor violations, public corruption and the catchall all, all potential criminal matters. The reason for this is that it allows our hotline to have broader appeal, so that if an ADA in our county or a police officer is promoting the hotline at an event or one of our community partners is promoting the hotline at an event for one of these categories, they are also, unbeknownst to them, in a way, promoting the hate crimes hotline. Even if they're not saying that it's there, when it is used, you hear the other options.

A lot of what we did with our hotline and our strategies, were very dependent on our resources. We are a--we're a large county outside of New York City. But in all things considered, we're pretty small. So, we chose to go the voicemail route because it's available all year long 24/7. It allows someone to submit a complaint on the go if they're not comfortable speaking to someone immediately or if they're not comfortable speaking to a police officer or anybody else. It allows them a little bit of the privacy that comes with a voicemail, someone not answering, not talking at you in a way while you're leaving your complaint or your tip.

It also gives us an opportunity as the District Attorney's Office, the people that are responding to these calls, to prepare for their response. So at some times, that means preparing in terms of having the person that is versed in the topic be the person that calls back. It also gives us the opportunity to reach out to our resources, our community partners. If the incident or whatever is reported maybe is not hate or bias, it gives us an opportunity to find the person that we're going to refer that to without having to--it allows us to go into the call prepared. So that we don't have to tell the caller, "We'll call you back another time to give you the information." That said, all our calls are answered within a couple of hours usually. If it's a weekend, it might take a little bit longer. But we try to respond to our calls, definitely within 24 hours; but if it's during business hours, certainly within a couple of hours of the call coming in.

Having the message recorded, as a hotline with a voicemail does, it allows us to forward it internally if it needs to be forwarded to a more appropriate person or more appropriate coordinator in a different part of the office, which also allows us to--at the same time, before we forward a message, before we call anyone back, make sure that we're not speaking to a defendant. We never want to violate a defendant's rights and speaking to them without their attorney. I think Fay mentioned this during her part of this presentation as well. We never want to do something that's going to affect someone's criminal case, especially because we are usually the prosecuting agency. The voicemail, because they are--they come--they do come to a voicemail on a phone system, but they also are sent to us via email. So, it allows us to access these voicemails remotely, and they're easy to share. We don't have to be in the office to listen to the voicemail. We don't have to be at one particular phone to access it or within the county. It can be accessed anywhere that we have access to our emails.

In releasing the hotline, we also partnered with many of our community partners, our community organizations to promote the number. It included the county itself, as well as the Human Rights Commission, for example, and other organizations within the county that wanted to promote the number to their constituents.

And I think one of the last things that I wanted to just mention is that because it's a voicemail, we have a caller ID system, which is very helpful if someone forgets to leave a number or if the call is difficult to hear. It allows us to always have someone to call back. And I know that this--I--Fay, I think you mentioned this as well, that there might be a confidentiality issue. That is something that we, as a district attorney's office, do struggle with a little bit. Because everything that comes in to us, while we do serve the

victim and allowing them an opportunity to voice their concerns and we do put them in touch with community partners, they are able to assist them in dealing with the situation that they're in. We are mostly a prosecuting agency, so most of our tips come in as investigative leads. And so that is--that is a line that we tow.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you. So many--so many good strategies and points. And just to--I know our time is getting near for this webinar.

So, my next question is, what do you consider that are the challenges in doing this type of work? Fay, could you--we start with you?

FAY STETZ-WATERS: Certainly. I'll be quick. I know we're running out of time here. You know, law enforcement, we did not expect law enforcement to respond the way that they did. We expected law enforcement to be fully on board. We were taking work off of their table handling the bias incidents and the bias response and helping support people. But it was 2020. They didn't get the message between COVID and the racial justice protests that it was challenging. And we had a piecemeal approach. It was like putting an octopus to bed. You know, contacting each law enforcement agency, each officer, each agent, you know, talking to chiefs and sheriff's offices about the changes in the law and what the expectation and requirements would be.

The work is always growing. Hatemongers, Internet bring us new ways of--vile ways of treating each other. So it's challenging, trying to keep up and with the new ways that hate manifests itself in world events, local events. We're getting upticks in our data for around elections, around the school year, around Black History Month, AAPI History Month, Pride Month, more months than not. So, the work is always growing. It means our staffs are always--our staff is very busy.

I worry about their safety. I worry about keeping such a talented bunch of people whole. This work can be really demanding and so--and very stressful. So, you know, keeping enough people involved in the work and then allowing people to tap out when you can't handle that call today, giving them other work, you know, working on our social media, working on our data, working on our case management system, and those types of things, so that people have enough time away from the work.

And then just money. Money and systems, those have all been challenging, making sure that we have the latest. I wish that we had had the proprietary software for our data collection. We've had to build these things from scratch. So, those are some of the challenges we've had--experienced.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you, Fay.

And Catalina and Cristina?

CATALINA BLANCO BUITRAGO: So, I--I'm going to have to second that, Fay. And I'm sure, Terri, you're going to say the same thing. But money is always the big thing. We

are--even though in the grand scheme of the counties here in New York State, we are a big county. Resources are what dictated our hotline model from the beginning. We never had the ability to even really consider a live hotline. It was something that was briefly in our mind that we quickly realized wasn't feasible.

And for us, that was the weekend responses. I think I mentioned this earlier. Like, we don't have the ability to have someone on 24/7. We didn't want to have someone on only during the day and then have it switched and have someone be confused as to why during the day maybe they're on hold or somebody is answering and at night they're leaving a voicemail. So, there was a little bit of that.

Also, we--I think one of the big challenges that we faced was that we initially--I think it's very easy to think of a hotline as the replacement for every other form of complaint submission. But we quickly again realized that it was never going to be that. That this was going to be an addition, it was going to be an "and," an addition to what we already have so that we could ensure that we weren't affecting the accessibility, whether it's for a disability for someone that's trying to leave a tip or just accessibility for someone that's not comfortable submitting an email or going through our other forms of complaints. So, we quickly realized that it was going to be an addition, something else that we were going to be doing.

Data storage when we have a voicemail system is a big part of it. We are very lucky that every voicemail also goes to our email, but it's easy to forget that there's a physical voicemail somewhere that needs to be deleted every so often so that we don't--we don't have like an overflow and people can continue leaving messages. So, that's something that we were thinking about. And also the duration of that voicemail. How long is too long? How short is too short? So, that was another thing that was really on our mind.

And I think the training of operators. We quickly, again, realized that we wouldn't have the resources to train operators in the topics or to have operators in--with the language proficiency that would be necessary for a live hotline.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you so much.

And Terri?

TERRI MCDOWELL: Yeah. I echo what was said about the funding. We were able to use a change in language. We began to describe how our work was addressing a public health crisis in terms of the racism that we have seen this last year. We have benefited from attacks in the county that helps to prevent the use of trauma centers. And so in describing how our work promotes public safety and doesn't lead people to go to emergency rooms, we have now long-term funding. So, funding has always been an issue. But using a language that resonates with different sectors has really helped.

Law enforcement, yeah, they continue to not be as responsive, particularly to victims of hate incidents. So, we are actually using some of our American Rescue Plan dollars to do concerted outreach to law enforcement.

I'd say last, marketing. I forgot to mention right behind you, you see some beautiful-- that's our logo, LA vs. Hate. And we started with the hope that we could go to a traditional model, and we ended up going with a nontraditional model, a very art-focused marketing firm, and using digital media, social media, free downloadable art that can be turned into posters, banners, T-shirts. And that has really helped our message, but it's taken time.

But having said that, we just passed a billion views on the website for all the LA vs. Hate beautiful art that is coming out of the neighborhood. So, happy to have met you all. I'm going to reach out to all of you.

SILVIA TORRES: Thank you, everybody, not only for joining us in this webinar, sharing your experiences, but also for doing this hard but much needed work. Thank you. And, Melissa, thank you for your time and, you know, your message. I'm sure it's much appreciated by the participants that are joining us today in this webinar. Thank you, everybody. And now, I'll turn it over to Daryl.

DARYL FOX: Okay. So, on behalf of the Office for Victims of Crime and our panelists, I want to thank you for joining today's webinar. This will end today's presentation.