



**Testimony to the New York City Council Joint Committee on Women and Gender Equity  
and Committee on Civil and Human Rights  
Expanding Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence  
December 12, 2022**

**Introduction and Thanks:**

My name is Jacqueline Collazo, LMHC, and I am the Sector Director of Domestic Violence Services for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Williams, Chair Cabán as well as the other members of this Committee, for the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

**About Us:**

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in the New York area by 2050 through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 11,000 adults and children annually through 65 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

**Expanding Protections for Survivors of Domestic Violence:**

First, I would like to thank Chair Cabán and Chair Williams for hosting this important hearing. VOA-GNY works with survivors of domestic violence at our seven confidentially located residences throughout the City, and assists many more in our shelters, transitional housing and supportive housing. The focus on this population throughout several Committee hearings in 2022, and through important initiatives such as DoVE funding and the microgrant program passed by the Council, have been heartening for us as advocates and providers. This is a Council that understands the challenges our clients face.

We support Int. 0148, expanding protections to include those who suffer economic abuse. Financial abuse and coercion are real challenges that our survivors face. These take many forms. Our clients have experienced their abusers stealing funds they earned from shared accounts, or by controlling the account and passing along only a fraction of the earned income to their partner. Credit has been ruined and debt accumulated with no intention of payback, severely damaging our clients' ability to find and secure permanent housing. Abusers have visited workplaces, stalking their partners and threatening their ability to earn altogether.

In a high-cost area like New York City, entwined finances and the difficulty of being a one-earner household, especially with the involvement of children, keep people in domestic violence situations longer than they should. It is simply too difficult to meet costs. This gives abusers leverage and it makes finances into another tool for abuse. Sadly, all of these challenges are more pronounced in the undocumented survivors that we work with, demonstrating the intersectionality of these problems. Overall, many do not realize that economic abuse is a form of DV, which we hope will change with this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and commitment to this issue.

*Respectfully submitted by:*

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