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'One-stop' center would serve domestic violence victims

Simplify - Multnomah County and Portland would like to link many services to one location

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Today, when a Multnomah County woman reaches out for help leaving an abusive relationship, she may wind up holding a sheet of paper with 93 phone numbers on it.

The county Domestic Violence Resources list has information on agencies that help with emergency shelters, immigration aid, restraining orders, child care and many more services. The set of phone calls and office visits is so daunting that it can discourage people fleeing domestic abuse.

Portland and Multnomah County want to replace that long list with a safe, unified center where women can file for restraining orders, get financial advice and even file a police report.

The center, which would probably be in East Portland, wouldn't replace existing agencies that offer services for domestic violence survivors, just make it easier to access those services. It wouldn't provide beds, for instance, but would refer people to shelters with space.

"The idea is to really establish a physical focal point where people can go to get help," said City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who organized a committee that studied creating a "one-stop" domestic violence center in Portland. "Survivors are overwhelmed by what they get now."

Other centers studied

Cities including San Diego and Tacoma have started similar centers and have seen big increases in the number of people seeking help to escape abuse. Saltzman and others planning the Portland center studied those sites to create a model center and figure out how to deal with challenges, including offering access to police to those who want to make a criminal complaint without forcing unwilling women into the criminal justice system.

The committee's final report, being presented to the Portland City Council today, proposes a center run through a city-county governmental agreement, employing four

people: a director, deputy director, receptionist and security officer. Three victim advocates and someone to offer civil legal advice would be hired through contracts with nonprofit groups. Other nonprofits could also have staff at the center, such as people who can work with domestic violence victims from various ethnic groups or sexual minorities.

Police and a deputy district attorney would be nearby if women wanted. But "there will be a sort of a firewall between the law-enforcement side of things and victim providers" for people who don't want to involve cops and courts, Saltzman said.

Protection from abusers

Many women who have been abused now head to the courthouse as a first stop, said Shannon Callahan, Saltzman's director of social policy. "It's a pretty daunting, scary process," she said. "Abusers can go there as well."

The center's outside windows would contain one-way glass, so security staff could watch for abusers who might show up. Inside, domestic violence victims would talk to an advocate who would help them find the services they need, including safety planning, child care and referral to shelters.

The center may also connect violence victims to services available elsewhere, including county health services. Saltzman envisions systems that let people file for restraining orders on-site, without heading to the county courthouse.

Planners picture putting the center near 102nd Avenue and East Burnside Street. The county owns a building there that could hold the center. Police, a sheriff's deputy and victim advocates in two different law enforcement programs focused on domestic violence already work at that location. And the site has good access by bus and light rail, they said.

Saltzman estimates that it would cost \$2.1 million to start the center and about \$700,000 a year to run it. He has requested all the money to start the center in the upcoming city budget, still being finalized by the City Council. He also asked for more than \$500,000 in ongoing operating funds. The county would pay for some of the services, such as the deputy district attorney.

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