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Department of  
Public Safety

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STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OP-ED

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## You are Not Alone; Help is Available

*Crisis services are open to help victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assaults*

By: L. Diane Casto, MPA, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA)

On March 11, Governor Dunleavy declared a public health emergency to protect Alaskans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the country. The following week, a health mandate was issued requiring all Alaskans, except critical and essential workers, to remain at their place of residence and practice social distancing. This mandate, as well as the other health mandates, are vitally important and necessary to keep Alaskans safe from the virus.

Unfortunately, staying at home, sheltering in place and social distancing have unintended consequences in homes where violence, control and abusive behaviors are happening. Homes where abuse and violence occur are not safe havens; rather they create smothering isolation, fear and increased violence, abuse and control. Domestic and family violence happens daily in Alaska. While social distancing does not create violence, CDVSA knows that isolation increases both the intensity and frequency of abusive behaviors.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency declaration the crisis shelters and service providers remain open. We want all victims and survivors to know, **you are not alone; help is available**. While we know it is more difficult to reach out for help during this challenging time, and to find safe ways to seek help, services are open and available. All 35 funded programs are working hard to find creative, safe and alternative ways to provide support while following the necessary health mandates.

Our message is clear; **if you can safely reach out for help, please do so**. Seventeen (17) of our funded programs continue to provide 24/7 emergency safety and shelter services. While programs face challenges to provide shelter and safety, while also practicing social distancing in congregate living, they are open and committed to help victims become survivors. To compensate for reduced shelter space, all emergency and advocacy programs are working with community partners to secure other safe shelter options, to include hotels, B&Bs, and identified safe homes. Their commitment is that everyone who needs safe shelter can find safe shelter. For the health and safety of staff and participants, programs are practicing safe social distancing, in accordance with Alaska's health mandates, adapting services to use telephone, text, email and secure video opportunities when available.

Domestic and family violence programs throughout Alaska are showing their grit, determination and compassion for those in need of these critical, often life-saving services. The dedication of all our programs' employees is humbling; I recognize and commend each and every one of them.

To anyone who faces violence in the home or sexual assault, **remember, you are not alone.** If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic, sexual or any form of interpersonal violence or child abuse please reach out; safety, support and help is available.

Available resources include:

For immediate response **call 911**

**Alaska 2-1-1** for assistance, referrals, resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Call 800-799-7233

Text LOVEIS to 22522

Online chat at [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

Alaska's CARELINE at 877-266-4357

National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673)

To report child abuse at 800-478-4444 or online at [ReportChildAbuse@alaska.gov](mailto:ReportChildAbuse@alaska.gov)

For a listing of local victim services 24/7 hotlines go to:

<https://dps.alaska.gov/CDVSA/Services/VictimServices>

It is important during these challenging times that we look out for one another; take time to call, text and check-in with family, friends, neighbors and colleagues to make sure they are doing okay while staying home. We are all Alaskans and we are in this together—please know: **You are not alone, help is available.**

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L. Diane Casto, MPA, has served as the Executive Director for the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault since May 1, 2017. Prior to CDVSA, Casto worked for the Department of Health and Social Services for 21 years working in Child Protective Services, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Behavioral Health and BH Medicaid Reform.

The CDVSA, within the Department of Public Safety, is responsible for reducing and ending domestic and sexual violence in Alaska. To this end, CDVSA funds 35 community-based non-profit agencies across Alaska providing emergency shelter, safety options for those living in abusive relationships, advocacy and support services, mental health support for children and youth who have been victims or witnessed violence, legal services for victims of interpersonal violence, and support for Alaska's network of Child Advocacy Centers serving child victims of physical and sexual abuse and their families.



Alaska's Council on  
Domestic Violence  
& Sexual Assault