



Alliance for Boys and Men of Color

September 25, 2023

The Honorable Pedro Nava
Chair, Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: A Lookback at California's Progress in Addressing Intimate Partner Violence

Dear Chair Nava and Commissioners,

As an organization dedicated to racial and gender justice, the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color has been working to reduce, prevent, and ultimately end intimate partner violence in California since 2019. Since then, the Alliance has created a robust coalition of partners that come together to change policies and systems, create tools and resources, and educate California policymakers on the need to center community safety, healing, and holistic support in order to end partner violence.

Over the past 4 years, more than [100 racial and gender justice organizations have joined the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color's Healing Together](#) campaign to foster healing-centered, innovative, and effective solutions to address intimate partner violence (IPV). We work to engage with men and people of all genders to build up safe communities and shift our responses to violence away from shame and punishment. Together, we publish [new resources and research](#) that highlight alternative approaches to our current crisis. Similarly, we convene to identify equitable policy solutions that move us toward healing.

The Commission has made strong recommendations to invest in prevention, provide holistic support, and improve interventions. However, since the publication of the Commission's reports, significant barriers and challenges remain. The state of California has failed to make the investments and policy changes needed to adequately respond to, prevent, and end cycles of gender-based violence.

The Commission's analyses about California's response to intimate partner violence highlighted several gaps and opportunities to strengthen state responses to violence. One key recommendation from this report was for California to adopt a comprehensive, all-government approach to ending and preventing IPV by creating a coordinated office to oversee state responses. ABMoC worked with over 100 community-serving and domestic violence organizations to advocate for stable funding of prevention programs and for the creation of a coordinated leadership

position for domestic violence. Unfortunately, the state failed yet again to create any meaningful investments in disrupting and preventing violence. This budget ask would have provided the necessary funding for domestic and sexual violence organizations to continue offering prevention and education services, and would have expanded efforts to develop innovative and culturally rooted interventions. Moreover, we lobbied for the creation of a unified senior adviser on violence prevention for the state within one of its public health agencies. As the Commission identified in its report, the state lacks a cohesive and unified response to IPV, which has dampened its ability to create enduring change.

By failing to make significant investments in violence prevention and intervention, California is falling behind national efforts to address intimate partner violence. This spring, the White House released a [national plan to end gender-based violence](#). The plan calls for a “comprehensive, whole-of-government, and intersectional approach” to ending domestic violence. The plan outlines the importance of focusing on prevention efforts as well as wrap-around services for people experiencing harm.

The Commission also called on the state to take a closer look at the batterer intervention programs (BIPs) and related systems to ensure that they offer true rehabilitative and healing services and that barriers to entering the programs are reduced. Since the report was released, the Alliance has worked with dozens of community organizations to [petition the state auditor to review and assess BIPs](#), their efficacy, and ways of improving program delivery. Our request also asked the auditor to assess how the efficacy of BIPs might differ if they were overseen by a state agency with an understanding of public health approaches to ending violence, as opposed to the current oversight from probation departments.

The Auditor’s [report, released last October](#), found that there are significant oversight and monitoring failures in part by the probation departments and that none of the probation departments included in the study had mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with state law. Moreover, the study showed that about half of the participants did not complete the mandated program, and many programs failed to assess participants for barriers that may hinder completion or participation. This study, as [well as other recent research](#), shows that California is deeply behind other states in how they design, monitor, resource, and support violence-prevention programming geared towards men and others who cause harm. Financial [burdens continue to be a barrier](#) for many to participate in these programs, as well as a lack of tailored and culturally appropriate programming.

In the legislature, [recent efforts to reform](#) the BIP system have suggested shifting the responsibility of oversight from probation departments to the Department of Justice. The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, in partnership with the state’s domestic violence coalition (the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence), has expressed strong concern about this proposal. Instead, we call for oversight of these programs to be placed within a state agency with expertise in public health approaches to ending violence and that California follow best practices from other

states. Ongoing opportunities for improvement remain, such as the creation of an advisory body to recommend standards and practices; stronger data collection and reporting standards; clarification and expansion of an absence policy; provision of holistic and wrap-around supports; and an equitable approach to the financing of programs.. As noted in the Little Hoover Commission report:

The state should review its requirements for batterer intervention programs to determine if they facilitate rehabilitation. Additionally, the state should begin a process to determine how to tailor rehabilitative services to an individual's needs. Finally, the state should ensure that rehabilitation is not contingent on an individual's ability to pay.

While we are concerned that the legislature is failing to make evidence-based transformations to the BIP system, policymakers have listened to community-based advocates and implemented two critical policy changes relating to partner violence.

First, California has renewed and expanded the Breaking Barriers to Employment Act to ensure that workforce development opportunities are inclusive of those who are victims of intimate partner violence or at risk of causing harm; and second, California is launching a grant program that will invest in police-free, community-based responses to a variety of emergencies, including partner violence.

It was a recommendation of the Little Hoover Commission's report to expand the Removing Barriers to Employment Act and explicitly include victims of domestic violence. Through our advocacy efforts with the California Immigrant Policy Center, California Workforce Association, and Creating Restorative Opportunities & Programs, we were able to secure an additional \$35 million over three years and ensure that community-based organizations serving persons who are victims of domestic violence or community violence can also access funds and provide holistic and healing-centered supports.

In 2021, the legislature passed the C.R.I.S.E.S Act (AB 118, Kamlager), which established a pilot program for community-centered alternatives to police involvement. With investments and programs like this, victims of violence are able to get healing-centered support from trained professionals and California will build up much-needed community-based infrastructure that helps keep our communities safe.

While these two policy advancements are important steps forward, the State response remains alarmingly inadequate given the severity of the crisis. More must be done to provide culturally rooted, healing-centered responses to partner violence—for all people, including those using violence.

[Research shows](#) that Californians are ready for more innovative approaches to IPV and believe that it is a problem that must be collectively addressed: 8 in 10 support alternatives to jail for people who cause domestic violence (including counseling or

restitution), and two-thirds feel domestic violence is a public issue that should be addressed by all of us. It is time for California's policymakers to listen to Californians, survivors, and advocates and implement a holistic state response that meets the urgency of the crisis.

As California policymakers repeatedly ignore best practices from other states and the federal government, the experience and expertise of those who work every day to foster safety and healing, and growing public concern—generations of Californians will continue to be subjected to the harm and trauma of partner violence.

We are grateful to the Little Hoover Commission for the continued focus on this issue and efforts to ensure California makes the prevention and intervention investments needed to end cycles of intimate partner violence.

Sincerely,

Eric Morrison-Smith

Eric Morrison-Smith
Executive Director, Alliance for Boys and Men of Color