

April 9, 2017

Dear Chair Romano and Commissioners on the Status of Women,

Thank you for your letter to the members of the Arlington County Board, dated March 18, 2017, about crime reporting related to sexual assault and other sexual offenses. On behalf of my colleagues, I appreciate your continued attention to this issues and commitment to keeping Arlington a safe and compassionate place. This letter includes responses to your questions, additional information about current efforts in Arlington County, and proposed next steps for the Commission and staff to improve partnership and collaboration on these issues.

To address domestic and sexual violence, Arlington County utilizes a coordinated community response organized through Project PEACE. This community-wide response includes partners from the Department of Human Services (DHS), Arlington County Police Department, the Sheriff's Department, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the Magistrate's Office, Doorways for Women and Families, Legal Services of Northern VA, and many other agencies and organizations. The overarching goals of Arlington's response is to ensure that: 1) victims have access to the services they need to support justice and healing; 2) batterers and perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence are held accountable for their actions; and 3) domestic and sexual violence outreach, awareness and prevention efforts are present and sustained in the schools and community. Highlights of Arlington's Project PEACE relevant accomplishments in the past year are:

- Establishment of a centralized 24/7 hotline for access to all victim services
- Launch of the REVIVE Counseling Center for victims of sexual and domestic violence
- Expansion of the scope of Project PEACE to include services for youth victims of dating and sexual violence
- Enhanced access to 24/7 accompaniment services for SANE exams, including a standing first responders' subcommittee to evaluate efficacy of referrals and services and solve problems case by case
- A division-wide Arlington Public Schools public awareness and education campaign, reaching over 3,000 students and parents
- Leadership of a coalition that successfully sought funding for expansion of SANE exam access in the region
- Implementation of a Bar Bystander Training Program with DHS, Arlington Police Department, the Commonwealth Attorney's Victim Witness Program, and Clarendon restaurant owners and managers

In addition to Project PEACE, Arlington's Commonwealth Attorney's Office convenes regular Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) meetings. This team focuses specifically on resources, legislation, policies, and procedures of partner agencies to address emerging sexual violence trends. As a direct result of Project PEACE and SART, every victim in Arlington who has wanted advocate support as they underwent a SANE exam has received it in the past year. Further, the Arlington County Police Department's Special Victims Unit has instituted trauma informed practices in conducting interviews with victims. Finally, Arlington's efforts are complementary to national campaigns and outreach on social media sending consistent messages that encourage reporting sexual assault to law enforcement.

Following are responses to your specific questions:

Has there been any change in how crimes are categorized that would account for this increased reporting of sexual assaults and other sexual offenses?

In the second half of 2016, the Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) transitioned to a new Records Management System that has changed the way crimes are reported to the State. In the past, crimes were reported under the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) system; now crimes are reported under the Incident-Based Reporting System which is more specific.

Lt. Reiten of ACPD/SVU confirmed that there were 42 reported rapes for 2016, but notes that a number (undetermined) of those were “late reports from sometimes years before” and were included as part of the data management system change. Mary Hale, Director of Inova FACT Department, reports that there were 29 completed rape exams for 2016.

Has the Board been made aware of these increases in the number of crimes? Has the Board instructed any county staff to take any action on them?

Changes in the ACPD records management combined with significant community efforts to encourage reporting may account for increases in incidents reported to police. Sexual assault is a highly underreported crime. Given local, regional and national efforts on outreach and awareness, it is reasonable to infer that assaults are not increasing in Arlington; but rather reporting to law enforcement may be increasing.

The Arlington County Board is regularly apprised of trends and efforts to address domestic and sexual violence. Since its founding ten years ago, a County Board member has served as co-chair of the Project PEACE Leadership Roundtable; I currently serve in this role and also participate in all SART meetings. The Project PEACE Leadership Roundtable meets quarterly and is presented updates on trends and activities across the community. In addition, the Roundtable is provided a written annual report that is also made available to the County Board. The annual report for this year is scheduled for completion in early July to coincide with the end of the County fiscal year and the end of the 2014-2017 Project PEACE Blueprint.

Why are these crimes not included in the Daily Crime Reports posted on the county website?

Not all sexual assaults are reported on the Daily Crime Report. Any sexual assault under investigation is not put on the Daily Crime Report, so as to preserve the integrity of the case. Secondly, victim privacy is a major concern in sexual assault cases. In order to balance victim privacy and public safety, if there is a “stranger” sexual assault, police normally will put out a press release to try to identify the offender and alert the community. And if there are a series of stranger sexual assaults, high publicity is practiced. All sexual assault incidents are reviewed by the Criminal Investigations Section prior to being placed on the Daily Crime Report. The Special Victims Unit in Arlington Police Criminal Investigations Section is the decider of what is placed on the daily crime report. Since the majority of sexual assaults involve an offender known to the victim as opposed to a stranger, most of these crimes are not included in the Daily Crime Reports. The Daily Crime Report has a disclaimer that states that not all incidents may be reported on the Daily Crime Report.

In 2016, there were two stranger rapes reported and in both of these incidents, the suspects were arrested.

The most frequently listed address on the crime reports is the 1400 block of North Courthouse Road (24 incidents in 2016). Is this the actual location of the incidents or is it used as the reported location for another reason?

This address is the police department (1425 North Courthouse Road). Victims of sexual offenses will come into the police department to file a report and thus this address is used on the report.

We appreciate your concerns as well as your participation in Project PEACE. My colleagues and I would also like to suggest that members of Project PEACE provide a presentation to the Commission on the Status of Women in the coming weeks, to follow up on your questions further and discuss ways for Commissioners to play a more active role in our coordinated community response to sexual assault.

Specifically, I would like to propose that Arlington County's Project PEACE Coordinator, Cheryl Bozarth, and my Project PEACE Co-Chair, Captain Michelle Nuneville, and I attend the May 11th meeting of the Commission to present and discuss these issues. My office will follow up to coordinate the meeting. In the meantime, if you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Bozarth. She can be reached at: cbozarth@arlingtonva.us or 703-228-1678.

Sincerely,

Katie Cristol
Vice Chair, Arlington County Board