December 14, 2018

To: Sylvia Pauling

From: Mass Rights for Change Collaboration (Worcester, MA)

Re: Statement of Focus

We are the collaboration Mass Rights for Change (MRfC) based in Worcester, MA. We created our name by taking parts of the name of each agency.

Our 3 agencies are:

* **Mass** Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)
* Victim **Rights** Law Center, (VRLC)
* Pathways **for Change**, Inc. (Pathways)

The MRfC team is committed to a survivor-centered approach that empowers individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) in Central Massachusetts who have experienced sexual violence. This will be the focus of our collaboration. Because we have two sexual violence agencies and one disability organization that is made up of people with I/DD to support people with I/DD, it made sense for our focus to be on victims of sexual violence who have I/DD.

More information about each of our agencies is below, as well as our vision and mission for our collaboration. Because we have self advocates in our collaboration, we have agreed to write all documents for this grant in plain language, to make sure it is accessible to all members of our collaboration.

**Mass Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)** is a grassroots self-advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the state of Massachusetts. The partners involved within this collaboration include members from the Central Massachusetts region of MASS. They are also the Awareness and Action team for Central Massachusetts. MASS is the only self-advocacy I/DD organization dedicated to providing peer-to-peer education about abuse and violence in Worcester County. Through its Awareness and Action Program, MASS’ self-advocates train others in Worcester County about how to recognize, report, and respond to abuse.

**Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC)** provides free legal services to sexual violence victims in Massachusetts. VRLC is the only organization to offer sexual assault-specific legal services in Worcester County. VRLC offers survivor-centered and empowering legal representation. VRLC’s clients include adults and children; people of all abilities, gender identities, and sexual orientations and immigrants, refugees, and undocumented people, regardless of immigration status.

VRLC provides legal help on issues such as:

* Privacy (for example: protecting private medical and mental health records)
* Disability (for example: help with government benefits)
* Immigration (supporting immigrant survivors with legal issues)
* Victim compensation (money for some of the costs that come from sexual violence)
* Education (for example: helping students with disabilities get accommodations in school)
* Employment rights (for example: helping a survivor safely stay or leave their job)
* Housing (for example: helping a survivor safely stay or leave their apartment)
* Safety (for example: helping a survivor get a protection order from the court)
* Supporting survivors within day programs and other disability programs

**Pathways for Change, Inc.** **(Pathways)** is a stand-alone multicultural rape crisis center (RCC). They provide trauma-informed services to survivors of sexual violence in ASL, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese. Pathways is well-known for innovative work that includes their Deaf Survivors Program (DSP), creating a hotline collaboration, work with sexually exploited individuals, and so much more. Pathways provides free support services to 47 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts which includes:

* 24-hour crisis intervention
* Support Counseling
* Healing Circles (support groups)
* Advocacy in medical, police and legal settings
* Prevention education for youth and adults
* Professional training
* Community outreach

**The MRfC Vision:**

We are all committed to making sure survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD get the support they need. We want to decrease if not stop sexual violence against people with I/DD.

The vision of Mass Rights for Change is to see a future that supports all victims of sexual violence who have I/DD to:

# Recognize they have been abused

* Know they have rights
* Be able to get the services they need without barriers
* Act on their power to manage their recovery and healing
* Have all the help they need to recover in their own way that works best for them

This vision will support all survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD to have doors opened. We will start with our 3 agencies and then we hope to do this across our area, our state, and hopefully the country.

**Our Mission:**

The mission of the MRfC team is to remove barriers and increase the services, access and support for survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD in Central Massachusetts. MASS, VRLC, and Pathways will work together to make this change happen by building a strong, on-going partnership, among the three agencies. We will do this through respect, team work, true listening and understanding. Specifically we will:

* Develop new ideas that will build trust for survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD
* Review, revise, and create policies, and practices within MASS, VRLC, and Pathways
* Create guidelines to increase accessibility and responsiveness
* Develop plan to improve how people are given help and increase safety with kindness and compassion, making sure that all survivors are believed
* Develop and provide training for the MRfC partners

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