**\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\***

**SUPERVISOR STEFANI INTRODUCES**

**THE SAN FRANCISCO VICTIMS’ RIGHTS INITIATIVE**

**FOR THE JUNE 2022 BALLOT**

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Today, Supervisor Stefani introduced the San Francisco Victim’s Rights Initiative for the June 2022 ballot, with co-sponsors Supervisors Mandelman, Melgar, Safai, and Haney. This initiative will provide much-needed support and comprehensive services to all victims by establishing the Office of Victim and Witness Rights as well as the Right to Civil Counsel for Victims of Domestic Violence. The Office of Victim and Witness Rights will also survey victims of crimes to identify gaps in service to help the city develop and implement new programs based on the needs of those they serve.

As crime in San Francisco has risen over the last few years, San Francisco crime victims are increasingly reporting that they feel ignored by the city. Each quarter, nearly 20,000 San Franciscans report that they are victims of a crime. However, almost 90% of those victims do not qualify for help. That means thousands of victims in San Francisco are left without the support they need from the city to advocate for themselves and to access critical services and restitution.

In addition, in cases of domestic violence, victims are often faced with complicated legal needs. The Victims’ Rights Initiative will establish a right to civil counsel for domestic violence survivors, so that every survivor has the representation they need to ensure their safety and security.

Supervisor Stefani said, “Currently, almost 90% of domestic violence cases are not resolved in criminal courts. In many of these cases that leaves the perpetrator returning to the home where the victim lives, often with children who are witnesses to and victims of abuse. The long-term, ongoing effects that these crimes have on victims and their families, particularly for women and at-risk communities, must be addressed.”

She continued to say, “The San Francisco Victims’ Rights Initiative will help provide services and support to all victims of crime, ensuring they understand and can access their legal rights. We must give a voice to all victims so that they can recover what was taken from them physically and emotionally. This initiative is critical to building a more just San Francisco.”

Co-sponsor Supervisor Mandelman said, “Victims of domestic violence in San Francisco need our support. The San Francisco Victims’ Rights Initiative will ensure the city is doing all it can to keep victims of domestic violence and other crimes safe. I am grateful to Supervisor Stefani for her continued leadership on behalf of domestic violence survivors.”

Supervisor and co-sponsor Matt Haney shared, “Every victim of domestic violence deserves and requires full-scope civil legal representation. No one should be forced to choose between their safety and their housing, custody, or well-being. This initiative will help to ensure that all victims receive comprehensive services and support from our city including non-English speaking victims and witnesses."

“As a survivor of domestic violence, I know first-hand the challenges that survivors and their families, especially immigrant families, face when living through these traumatic experiences. I am thankful for the support that my family received to help us move forward, heal, and remain whole” said co-sponsor Supervisor Myrna Melgar. “However, that support towards a path to recovery is not often the norm for BIPOC, immigrant survivors. Right to counsel is a game-changer for survivors and families to escape and heal from the violence inflicted upon them”.

“We have anecdotal and empirical data that demonstrate how critical access to legal aid and support services are for a path towards successful recovery” she continued to state. “Access to resources is key. Yet, often, high-risk survivors under report as the added fear of law enforcement is a significant barrier, making it more traumatic than helpful when access to resources or services is only available through law enforcement agencies.” She concluded “we need to provide options for folks already experiencing significant trauma to feel safe when a sense of safety is exactly what has been taken from them and prevented them from escaping domestic violence in the first place.”

Supervisor and co-sponsor Ahsha Safai stated, “As our city continues to invest in people and equity, Supervisor Stefani’s Victims’ Rights Initiative fills a serious void in our victim rights systems. For far too long, victims of crime have had to go through law enforcement systems to access victim rights services and resources. This law enforcement centralized approach has at times been harmful to many victims, especially to our victims of color who are harmed at disproportionate rates. The Victims’ Rights Initiative also provides critical services to survivors and victims of domestic violence by providing legal services to this population. This initiative will be a huge win for San Francisco. I wholeheartedly endorse it!”

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