



• SAN FRANCISCO •
WOMEN'S POLITICAL COMMITTEE

**SFWPC Support for Ordinance #240700
establishing the responsibilities of the Office of Victim
and Witness Rights (OVWR)**

October 10, 2023

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
City Hall, Legislative Chamber, Room 250
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: Ordinance #240700 - Administrative Code - Office of Victim and Witness Rights

Dear Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the San Francisco Women's Political Committee (SFWPC), we are writing to advocate for the passage of Ordinance #240700. This ordinance seeks to amend the Administrative Code to enhance the protection and support available to victims and witnesses through the Office of Victim and Witness Rights (OVWR). It is crucial to address the current gaps in support for survivors of trauma and victims of violence in our City, ensuring they have access to confidential, trauma-informed services and advocacy.

As an organization, supporting survivors, bringing accountability, and ending sexual violence have been a core reason for our existence. We appreciate the work done so far by the Office of Sexual Harassment and Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), but we believe that our City can do better to support survivors. The establishment of clearer responsibilities for the OVWR and strengthened confidentiality protections, as well as the move of Office of SHARP to OVWR, are both timely and necessary.

SHARP's ability to offer trauma-informed assistance, particularly by supporting victims through complex and often intimidating City processes, will help ensure that survivors receive the compassionate and respectful treatment they deserve. Additionally, the ability to hold other public safety agencies accountable gives the Office the necessary power to be a voice for survivors. The new structure will not only improve access to resources but also strengthen the integrity and accountability of our City's response to sexual harassment, assault, and related crimes.

We strongly emphasize the need for confidentiality and safeguarding of client information within the OVWR. Given that SHARP and OVWR are currently working with victims and survivors of violence, we urge the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the new confidentiality protections are implemented to apply to previous communications as well as future communications. Trauma services require a high degree of trust, safety, and privacy. It is absolutely essential that the OVWR and SHARP be able to shield client information to the highest degree under the law,

similar to the privilege and confidentiality afforded to counselors and attorneys who assist victims and survivors of violence.

We urge you to pass Ordinance #240700, as it will further San Francisco's commitment to trauma-informed, victim-centered services. Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership in advancing these crucial protections for survivors.

Sincerely,

SFWPC Board of Directors