

**Springfield City Council’s Task Force on Sexual Assault
Report to the City Council of Springfield, MO
October, 2019**

Appointed:

The Springfield City Council’s Task Force on Sexual Assault was appointed by Council Bill 2019-016, Resolution #10424 on January 28, 2019.

Members:

Sharon Alexander; Legal Services of Southern Missouri
Sarah Bargo; Me Too Springfield
Brandi Bartel; The Victim Center
Lisa Farmer; Harmony House; Task Force Chair
Phyllis Ferguson; Mayor Pro Tem
Jan Fisk; City Council
Dee Ogilvy; National Organization of Women, Southwest Missouri Chapter
Linda Saturno, Child Advocacy Center
Janice Thompson Gehrke; Community Representative

Task force members would also like to acknowledge the contributions and good work of those who assisted in the development of this report, including the sexual assault survivors who provided information and feedback, the Springfield Police Department, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Cox Health and Mercy SANE programs and others.

Task Force Charge:

The Sexual Assault Task Force (SATF) was charged with the following:

1. Review current City practices regarding sexual assault;
2. Research and review identified best practices for the prevention, reporting, and investigation of sexual assaults throughout the United States;
3. Review and recommend specialized training and education opportunities that are available to first responders and service providers throughout the community, so they have necessary and up-to-date skills to most successfully and effectively work with victims of sexual assault;
4. Consider and make recommendations regarding an education campaign with the goal of teaching primary, secondary and tertiary safety and prevention management to reduce sexual assault within the community; and
5. Recommend an ongoing approach to measure the progress of implementation of the Task Force’s recommendations.

Background Information

The number of sexual assaults within the City of Springfield is not acceptable to leaders, stakeholders and citizens, and demonstrates the need for a proactive, unified approach to addressing sexual assault. The City sexual assault numbers listed below only include those incidents that were reported, thus the actual number of sexual assaults is larger than reflected in the numbers below because many sexual assaults are not reported.

Sexual assault is an issue that impacts all persons regardless of age, sex, race, gender identity, disability, socio-economic background, to name a few. While sexual assault impacts all persons, including children

and the elderly, there are certain populations that are more at-risk of becoming a victim of sexual assault.

City of Springfield Sexual Assault Numbers	
2008	95
2009	112
2010	120
2011	110
2012	141
2013	281*
2014	266
2015	298
2016	293
2017	352
2018	336
2019 (through 063019)	191
*FBI Changed the Definition of Rape	

In 2013, the FBI changed the definition of rape and the way crimes are reported creating an increase in the number of rape kits on an annual basis. In 2014, Springfield realized an increase in untested rape kits due to the change in the law and underfunding for the State Crime Lab to handle the increased number of rape kits. In collaboration with the Missouri Attorney General, Missouri Highway Patrol, and the Missouri Crime Lab, the Springfield Police Chief worked to resolve this backlog.

Springfield has taken several important steps toward developing a plan to reduce sexual assault, and improve victim reporting and outcomes within the city by working with community stakeholders to:

- improve law enforcement training and embed advocates at the Police Department;
- collaboratively create the Greene County Family Justice Center;
- utilize law enforcement tax dollars to increase the number of detectives in the city’s Crimes Against Persons Unit;
- waive the incident report fee for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence; and
- to enhance sexual assault materials distributed through the Police Department.

The City of Springfield Chief of Police was also selected to serve on the Missouri Attorney General’s Task Force on Sexual Assault Kits.

Scope of the Problem:

The response to sexual assault victims (women, men, non-binary, and children) is an issue that has received much national attention over the last couple of decades. However, the fact remains that most sexual

assaults, both nationally and in Springfield, are never reported to local law enforcement. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that as recently as 2014, only one third of rapes and sexual assaults were being

reported to the police. Further, when victims do come forward to report a rape or sexual assault, the majority of cases will not be prosecuted. The reasons for this are varied; there are often lengthy delays in rape kit testing at the state crime labs; some cases are suspended by law enforcement due to insufficient evidence; some are suspended by the victim; and some are declined by the prosecution. As an example, out of 336 reported cases in 2018 in Springfield, just nineteen or 6% resulted in charges being filed.

There are many factors that contribute to the lack of reporting and victims opting out of the prosecution process. According to the Police Executive Research Forum “Rape is an extremely intimate crime and victims suffer physical as well as emotional harms that can be devastating. As victims try to cope with the trauma of the crime itself, they often suffer additional harm when they are subtly, or not so subtly, blamed for being victimized, in ways that victims of robbery or theft or any other crime are never blamed. Finally, sexual assault victims who summon the courage to report the crime to the police are often subjected to a criminal justice system that seems insensitive, uncaring or even hostile to victims.” Other contributing factors include such things as the length of time it takes to prosecute cases, which can result in victim fatigue; a judicial system that is not always educated in trauma-informed practices; and a general and widespread lack of community awareness about the criminal justice system and victim rights.

While Springfield has made great strides in the response to sexual assault victims over the last two decades, there is more that can and should be done to ensure that victims are not afraid to report; to make the criminal justice system more trauma-informed; and to improve outcomes for victims.

Scope of Work:

The SATF met ten times from February through October 2019, with the first two meetings being “listening” meetings. The SATF invited the Springfield Police Department, the Greene County Prosecutor’s Office, the Cox Health Sexual Assault Program, and the Mercy Sexual Assault Program to each give a 45-minute presentation on the state of sexual assault response in Springfield from their unique perspective; what’s working and what’s not working.

After hearing from each of these key organizations, the task force went through a debriefing process to determine the key points and identify other needs and gaps in sexual assault services within Springfield. After going through this process, the task force identified several key priority areas and was then divided into three small work groups to conduct research into best practices for each of the identified priorities. The key priorities assigned to the work groups included:

1. Data analysis and community/provider education about sexual assault/sexual violence
2. Victim “fallout” (i.e. 1/3 of victims do not complete process) of the system
3. The local court system and offender consequences

Task Force Recommendations

After hearing from each small group about their area of research, the task force conducted a final debriefing and prioritization session to determine final recommendations to be brought forward to City Council. During this process, task force members agreed that foundational change is essential to long-term success and that changing social norms is the key to foundational change. While not all encompassing and with acknowledgement that gaps remain, members were in consensus that the initial focus should be on two key goals that will drive foundational change:

- Improve community awareness about sexual assault prevention, sexual assault reporting and victim rights
- Increase victim reporting, decrease victim fallout of the criminal justice process by improving the victim experience throughout the criminal justice system and improving victim outcomes

The SATF recommends to City Council that the following steps be taken to address sexual assault and better support sexual assault victims in our community:

1. *Appoint a qualified team to focus on a gaps analysis of sexual assault data collected within the private and public sectors and to conduct a community survey on attitudes and norms about sexual assault/sexual violence in Springfield.*

Rationale: Based on our work, we believe that there is already good local data available about sexual assault and victim response/needs in Springfield. However, the data needs to be gathered and then analyzed from a systems perspective. The task force also believes that there is a data gap in the area of community attitudes, education and awareness about sexual assault/sexual violence. We believe that before we, as a community, can better address our response to sexual assault, we must first understand the current state, thus a comprehensive analysis of the data is required as a first step.

The data team should focus on:

- a. Conducting an analysis of current available local sexual assault/victim data;
 - b. Development of a community survey to measure community attitudes and awareness/education about sexual assault;
 - c. Establishment of new and improved systems for meeting gaps in data collection processes;
 - d. Sharing data across systems to create improved system-wide communication and response to victim needs; and
 - e. Repeating the survey on a three to five year basis to measure community attitudes and changes in attitudes since the last survey; identify trends and measure general awareness about sexual assault and progress made from prior education campaigns.
2. *Based on the data analysis and community survey, develop and implement a community education and awareness campaign to improve Springfield-area social norms regarding sexual violence.*

Rationale: A key charge to the task force was to make recommendations regarding education for both first responders and the broader community. It is the perception of the task force that there are ample educational opportunities available about sexual assault/sexual violence and trauma-informed practices for first responders, healthcare professionals, law enforcement and others in the victim service field. Task force members were in consensus, however, that education targeting the general community, including marginalized sectors, with information about sexual assault/violence and victim rights is not as abundant and is essential to preventing sexual violence and improving the likelihood that victims will report and not fall out of the system.

The task force recommends that a community awareness campaign be developed and implemented. Specific recommendations include the following:

- a. Led by the City of Springfield Public Information Office, establish a qualified work group to help shape and implement the campaign;
- b. Based upon data analysis, identify the target audience(s) and key messages; to include public education about victim rights and how to file victim case concerns through the Springfield Police Department/Victim Center joint hotline.
- c. Implement the campaign with special attention to communicating to marginalized audiences;
- d. Update the campaign as needed based on new community survey data and repeat the campaign on a three to five year basis to refresh community awareness and bring forward new information developed in the field; and

- e. Consider implementing or expanding other best practice awareness programs such as Green Dot.
3. *Collaborate to create a Springfield/Greene County integrated sexual violence court and implement ongoing education opportunities about victims and trauma-centered practices.*

Rationale: It is essential for law enforcement, the Prosecutor's Office, the Court system and key victim service organizations to work together toward a common goal of holding offenders accountable and improving outcomes for victims.

The task force would like to formally note the following:

- a. The task force believes there would be tremendous benefit in the establishment of a Springfield/Greene County integrated sexual violence court. It is our belief that such a court will not only reduce further victim trauma and improve overall outcomes for victims, but by streamlining the process for victims, judges and staff, will potentially ease the burden on the court system as well.
- b. The task force would like it noted that there is a need for ongoing judicial education about trauma and trauma-centered approaches. Specifically, the task force believes a statewide initiative to require annual continuing judicial education in this area would benefit sexual assault victims in all Missouri communities.
- c. There is a need to educate victims about their rights and how to file complaints when they believe those rights have not been upheld.

We encourage Springfield City Council to facilitate opportunities for these agencies and groups to regularly work together for the improvement of the criminal justice system and the victim experience within it. A quarterly or bi-annual meeting focused on sexual assault response held with members of these three entities, as well as other key partners, would be a good first step. Additionally, this group should consider releasing a semi-annual community report based on the compilation of local sexual violence data from partnering agencies.

4. *The City of Springfield should continue to explore and pursue potential funding sources so that additional victim advocates can be imbedded within the Springfield Police Department to ensure that trauma-informed procedures are utilized in all work with victims and that victim rights are upheld throughout a trauma-informed, victim centered investigative process.*

Rationale: The task force recognizes that the caseload for officers handling sexual assaults is quite large. It is also recognized that victim advocates are valuable partners to law enforcement throughout the criminal justice process. According to the Police Executive Research Forum "Research has shown that victims who worked with advocates were more likely to have police reports taken and were less likely to have negative experiences with police officer than those who did not work with advocates." The recent award of the Violence Against Women's Improving Criminal Justice Responses grant is an important and significant first step as it will fund two victim advocates to be imbedded within the SPD's sexual assault and domestic violence units. However, in order to ensure a victim advocate is available within the SPD 24/7, more are ultimately needed.

5. *It is recommended that Springfield City Council include sexual assault initiatives as part of the annual legislative priorities that are taken forward to the Missouri Legislature each year.*

Rationale: The task force recognizes that some best practices and leading-edge sexual assault initiatives are beyond the scope of local government and will require a statewide mandate to drive systemic change. The City of Springfield should be a leader in encouraging the pursuit of state-wide

legislative reforms and initiatives that will improve trauma-informed practices within the criminal justice system; streamline the processing of rape kits; hold offenders accountable; enhance victim safety and otherwise improve outcomes for sexual assault victims.

Final Remarks:

Members of the Springfield City Council's Task Force on Sexual Assault appreciate the desire of the Council to reduce sexual assault crimes and their concern for those victims in our community. With more than 85% of sexual assault perpetrators known by their victims, we know that our research and recommendations are not all encompassing because we did not consider the significant impact of domestic violence in sexual assault cases. This task force would be remiss if it did not suggest that additional study and review of domestic violence in the Springfield community be considered in affecting and reducing the number of sexual assault cases in this area.

Acknowledgments:

Greene County Prosecutor's Office and Dan Patterson
Springfield Police Department and Chief Paul Williams
Mercy Communities – Springfield and Dawn Day
Cox Health and Brooke Batesel
City of Springfield Clerks Office and Anita Cotter
Springfield Public Information Office and Cora Scott
Springfield Public Schools and Marti Moore
Any and all others who participated in presenting information to the task force