



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

MARCH 26, 2019

Domestic Violence Resources for County Employees Are Limited and Hard to Find

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Executive Summary

King County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy has not been updated since 2006, and the County's domestic violence related-resources for employees are limited and hard to find. This can prevent or deter employees from seeking help and make providing assistance to employees more difficult for supervisors, who can be the first or only person to whom an employee discloses. We make recommendations to update the policy and help ensure employees are able to find useful information on rights, expectations, and resources.



King County

Domestic Violence Resources for County Employees Are Limited and Hard to Find

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

What We Found

King County has a Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy for Executive branch employees, which is notable among employers in the United States. However, the policy has not been updated since 2006, and the County's domestic violence related resources for employees are limited and hard to find, which may delay or prevent employees' access to assistance. For example, the County's main guidance document for employees contains outdated information and incorrect phone numbers for resources like victim service organizations.

Our survey of county supervisors found that more than 60 supervisors have handled an employee domestic violence concern during their time with the County (see graphic below, right). Furthermore, nearly half of those supervisors had handled more than one concern, and some supervisors reported that they did not bring all domestic violence concerns to someone in a position above them. This emphasizes the importance of employees having accurate and accessible information on rights, expectations, and resources to help effectively address employee domestic violence concerns. However, the County provides limited awareness materials and no general training on domestic violence or the policy.

What We Recommend

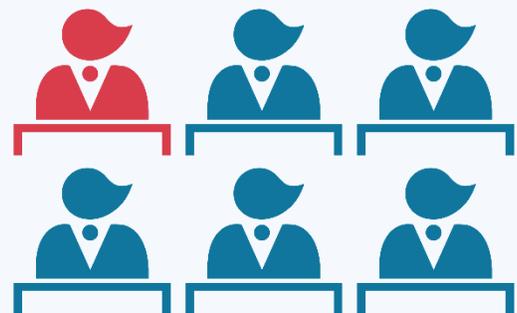
We make recommendations to update the County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and guidance documents, and improve access to training and online resources to support supervisors and help ensure employees have accurate and accessible information on rights, expectations, and ways to get assistance. This will help improve employee safety and well-being.

Why This Audit Is Important

King County has about 15,000 employees, some of whom have or are likely to experience domestic violence while they are working for the County. Domestic violence can consist of physical, sexual, psychological, and/or emotional abuse. In the United States, one in four women and one in nine men have experienced violence by an intimate partner, and a recent review found that nearly half of all women who were victims of homicide between 2007 and 2017 were killed by a current or former partner.

An organized and informed response system for employees experiencing domestic violence can help the County improve employee safety and well-being.

One in six supervisors surveyed have overseen employees experiencing a domestic violence concern¹



¹ Sixty four supervisors surveyed answered yes, and 291 answered no. See the complete response to this question on page 12.

Domestic Violence Resources for County Employees Are Limited and Hard to Find

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Supervisors Are Responding to Domestic Violence Concerns

SECTION SUMMARY

Supervisors and human resources managers are handling domestic violence concerns and must navigate a number of resources in order to address safety and well-being needs. More than 60 supervisors we surveyed, and 15 out of the 16 human resource (HR) managers we interviewed, have responded to one or more employee domestic violence concerns during their time with the County. The County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and handbook outline a number of actions supervisors may take, including working with key agencies such as the Facilities Management Division and the Department of Information Technology when domestic violence issues arise.² Given the vital role of supervisors, to whom the policy encourages employees to reach out and receive help from, it is important that the County ensure supervisors have the knowledge and resources they need to provide appropriate support to employees.

Supervisors are responding to domestic violence concerns

Supervisors play a key role in responding to domestic violence concerns, as they may be the first or only individuals to whom an employee discloses their experience. It is important that the County ensure supervisors are prepared so employees receive timely and appropriate assistance. Our survey of supervisors across all agencies showed that 64 supervisors have handled an employee domestic violence concern during their time with the County.³ About half of those supervisors handled more than one concern. In addition, all but one of the 16 HR managers we interviewed reported they had handled employee domestic violence concerns.

According to the County's policy, supervisors are expected to help employees with domestic violence concerns navigate a number of resources. The policy states supervisors should, as appropriate, take actions such as: consulting with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or department's HR professional; working with the employee to temporarily adjust their work schedule or site as needed; granting leave to allow the employee to seek assistance; and treating information about the employee as confidential. Exhibit A, below, outlines the various actions identified in the County's policy and handbook for supervisors in the case of a domestic violence concern.

² The policy is King County Administrative Policies & Procedures PER 18-5-2 (AEP) and the handbook is titled "Domestic Violence in the Workplace: Prevention, Intervention & Response."

³ We sent an online survey to 1,487 supervisors of Executive Branch employees in December 2018 and January 2019, and received 395 responses. For more detailed information about the survey and its results, please see Supervisor Survey in Appendices.

EXHIBIT A: The domestic violence in the workplace policy details a number of actions supervisors and employees may take to address concerns



Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and handbook

Some supervisors may be handling domestic violence concerns on their own, so it is important the County ensure supervisors have the knowledge and resources they need to provide appropriate support to employees. The majority of HR managers we spoke to believe or hope that supervisors will reach out to them for confidential assistance with employee domestic violence concerns. However, 12 supervisors reported in the survey that they had not raised an employee's domestic violence concern to someone above them in the past because the employee asked them not to share the information. The EAP can serve as a trained, confidential resource to help employees and supervisors with needs like safety planning and working with other county agencies. Some HR managers we interviewed noted they have used EAP for this purpose and found it to be a responsive and helpful centralized resource. In our survey, we found that roughly 20 percent of supervisors reported consulting with the EAP about their most recent employee concern. Considering one in four women and one in nine men nationally have experienced violence by an intimate partner, it is possible that more King County employees have or are experiencing domestic violence and not disclosing it to anyone at the County. While it may not be necessary for HR managers or Department of Human Resources (DHR) leadership to be aware of all domestic violence concerns in order for those concerns to be appropriately addressed, the fact that a supervisor may be the first or only person to hear of a concern underscores the importance of ensuring supervisors are prepared. The rest of this report addresses how the County can ensure that supervisors and other staff are equipped to address workplace domestic violence concerns.



Resources Are Scattered, Limited, or Inaccessible

SECTION SUMMARY

The County's policy and resources available to support supervisors are outdated and scattered. This could lead to situations where employees seeking help are not getting the access to resources that they need. The County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and handbook outline actions a supervisor could take to support an employee with a domestic violence concern, such as helping employees identify support, working with other county agencies to address safety and privacy concerns, and maintaining employee confidentiality. The County has resources such as websites, a handbook, and support programs to help supervisors and employees understand rights, expectations, and ways to get help. These resources are scattered, however, and managers and supervisors we spoke to were not consistently aware of them. Many had not taken any training related to the County's policy, as the County has not offered a training in many years, which means supervisors may struggle to recognize domestic violence and could be trying to handle domestic violence concerns with inconsistent information.

County does not offer training, which impacts preparedness to respond to domestic violence concerns

While there is a section on the domestic violence policy in the County's new employee orientation and workplace violence prevention training, the County does not offer a general training on domestic violence or the policy, which could impact the County's preparedness to respond to domestic violence concerns.⁴ Sixty-two percent of supervisors we surveyed have not—or could not remember if they had—taken a training on the County's policy. For those who had taken a training, it may be because the County had offered one when the policy was first created in 2006, but these trainings were cut in 2014. Domestic violence is a complex issue for which there are many common misconceptions, and without proper training employees or supervisors may lack the skills to recognize or respond to domestic violence. For example, work-related issues that may stem from domestic violence like tardiness or absenteeism could be mistaken as poor performance. Symptoms of trauma such as strong emotional reactions could also be mistaken as poor performance. If a supervisor is not prepared, it could lead to a poor response, making the situation for the person experiencing domestic violence more difficult or potentially more dangerous.

⁴ The King County Sheriff's Office requires officers to take training on domestic violence, including understanding domestic violence, departmental policy, information about the Employee Assistance Program and other resources, and supervisor responsibilities.

We found that experts suggest, and model policies state, that offering training is an important component of an employer’s response to domestic violence as it helps ensure employees are prepared to recognize and handle domestic violence concerns. Additionally, our analysis shows that 85 percent of those who had received training felt well-equipped to respond to a domestic violence concern, compared to less than 50 percent of those who had not received training. (See Exhibit B.)

EXHIBIT B: Supervisors who have taken a training were more likely to feel well-equipped to handle a domestic violence concern.



*Of the 344 respondents to both statements, 171 answered no and 114 answered yes. Another 59—not included in the graphic above—answered maybe.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of survey data

Nearly 64 percent of supervisors who responded to our survey said in-person or online training availability would be helpful in improving their ability to respond to domestic violence concerns. Specifically, supervisors are interested in trainings that help them understand what they are expected to do as a supervisor, what resources are available, and how to manage workplace safety risks.

Recommendation 1

The Department of Human Resources should ensure that county supervisors and managers have access to training that provides them with the information they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence.

County policy and handbook are outdated

The County’s domestic violence policy and handbook are missing key components and contain broken links and outdated information, which could delay, discourage, or prevent an employee from receiving assistance. Expert organizations we interviewed stated that the fact the County has a workplace policy is a positive step. However, we found that the County’s policy is missing key elements identified in model domestic violence in the workplace policies as important to ensuring a supportive environment for employees to seek assistance. For example, the policy does not have an anti-retaliation clause or guidance for addressing domestic violence-related performance issues.⁵ Additionally, the policy contains non-functioning links to resources. This is likely because the policy has not been updated since 2006. The Executive’s policy on executive and departmental policies states that policies should be maintained to remain relevant and meaningful and requires that policies be proactively reenacted every five years to ensure this.⁶ The domestic violence in the workplace policy has not been updated in almost 13 years. The specific missing components mean that employees could fear or experience retaliation from their employer, be directed to a non-existent website or phone number, or have performance issues addressed inappropriately, potentially leading to negative impacts to the employee’s well-being, safety, or employment.

Like the policy, the County’s handbook also has not been updated since it was created in 2007, shortly after the County’s Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy was put into effect. The handbook for directors, managers, supervisors, and HR personnel contains information on the County’s policy, the warning signs of domestic violence, and employee rights and responsibilities. However, some of the content is outdated. For example, phone numbers and names for the shelter resources and victim service providers listed in the handbook are not all accurate. Without an updated policy and accurate information in the handbook, employees and supervisors may have difficulty understanding their rights and expectations, may not be able to get the help they need, or could use or pass on outdated information.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees the County’s Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy to reflect current county priorities and information on resources and ensure the policy is updated as required by executive policy.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees its Domestic Violence in the Workplace handbook and regularly ensure that its contents are up-to-date.

⁵ Anti-retaliation clauses prevent retaliation against employees who disclose their domestic violence concerns and/or request assistance. For example, the County’s HR guidance on domestic violence leave (Bulletin Number 2008-0006) includes language on anti-retaliation for the use of leave.

⁶ The “Drafting and Implementing Executive and Department Policies” policy (document code INF-7-4-EP) does not apply to the County’s Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy as it was enacted before January 2016.

Managers struggle with identifying correct contacts

Human resources managers are generally aware of how to connect people with county agencies or programs that can assist with well-being and safety needs, but reported struggling to figure out correct agency contacts, delaying an employee's access to resources. A number of key county agencies assist employees with safety and well-being needs in the case of a domestic violence concern, including Facilities Management Division (FMD), King County Information Technology (KCIT), and the Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO). HR managers with whom we spoke reported that these agencies have largely been responsive, but noted that they occasionally had to spend time tracking down the right person to speak with at these agencies to meet their needs. For example, one HR manager discussed a situation where an employee needed to be taken out of the online employee directory while they were handling a safety concern. The HR manager had not done this before and it took some time to find the right person to help.

While the policy and handbook provide suggestions for agencies that can help address issues, it does not identify specific contacts. Having to spend time searching for contact information can delay or prevent an employee from receiving help. It may also reduce confidentiality if people disclose information to the incorrect contact.

Recommendation 4

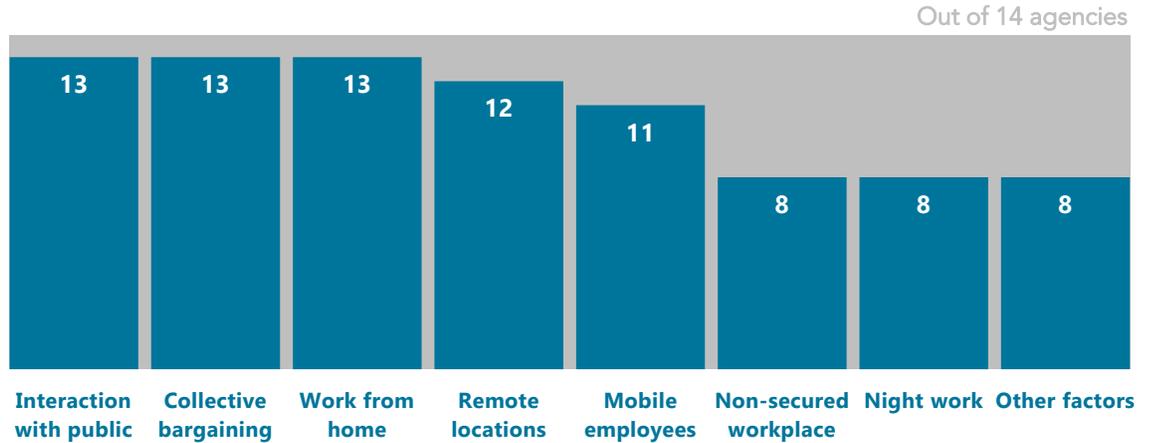
The Department of Human Resources should work with key agencies to establish and maintain contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns, and make that information available to employees.

Managers face challenges to meeting employee needs

County human resources managers and supervisors sometimes need to respond to job-specific challenges, which can create difficulty meeting employee safety or well-being needs. These challenges can affect a department's ability to adjust schedules, enhance the security of the work environment, and ensure employees receive adequate information about the policy and equitable access to available resources. For example, it may be more difficult to enhance workplace security for employees who perform mobile work tasks (such as bus drivers or property assessors), or work from home or remote locations.⁷ As another example, some employees have negotiated job parameters that limit scheduling or workload changes; these can affect a supervisor's approach to safety planning. HR managers from nearly all 14 agencies we interviewed reported that they have employees who are mobile, or work from home or remote locations. (See Exhibit C.)

⁷ Additionally, the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy excludes telecommuting work sites from the definition of workplace.

EXHIBIT C: Human resources managers from executive departments face many job-specific challenges to responding to domestic violence concerns



Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of interviews with human resources managers.

County agencies or support programs like the EAP may be able to help supervisors and employees manage risks and deal with these challenges, but there is limited information in the County’s handbook to help them prepare for these challenges or who to contact for help.

Recommendation 5

In order to ensure the varying needs of employees can be met, the Department of Human Resources should ensure guidance on domestic violence in the workplace includes information about job-specific challenges.

The handbook and policy do not provide guidance on domestic violence equity issues that could affect employees

The County’s handbook and policy do not provide guidance or information on domestic violence equity issues, which may reduce the County’s ability to address concerns for all employees seeking services. National public health and domestic violence organizations have stated that domestic violence is more prevalent, for example, for Native and multiracial women, bisexual women, people with disabilities, and immigrants and refugees. These intersections could affect county employees. For example, HR managers in seven of the 14 departments we spoke with reported that there are employees with limited English proficiency in their department, which can be one of the key challenges faced by immigrants and refugees in navigating domestic violence concerns. Without access to resources with information about these intersections, supervisors or county agencies assisting employees may struggle or fail to provide responsive resources or support, which could deter or delay employees from seeking help.

King County's Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan includes a vision for workplace and workforce equity where all employees "...experience being valued, interconnected, and part of a multicultural, supportive team that is culturally sensitive to their unique assets and needs." Since the prevalence of domestic violence varies by population, the County should provide guidance in its materials and training relevant to helping employees understand and be responsive to their needs.

Recommendation 6

The Department of Human Resources should ensure updates to the policy, handbook, and other resources are responsive to intersections between domestic violence and equity issues.

County online resources are difficult to find

The County's online resources on domestic violence can be difficult to find, which could delay, discourage, or prevent an employee from receiving assistance. We reviewed and conducted usability testing on the County's websites with information related to domestic violence and found that resources are difficult to find. Specifically, we had several county employees try to find resources and identify contacts for things that employees experiencing domestic violence or supervisors trying to assist them might look for, and we observed that they experienced difficulty finding some resources. When tasked with searching for guidance for county employees on getting help for domestic violence concerns, three out of five people did not come across the domestic violence handbook during their searches, which is intended to be one of the primary information resources for employees. KCIT noted that documents, like the handbook, are less likely to come up in searches within kingcounty.gov than webpages. Since the County does not have a webpage with employee-specific domestic violence resources, it is less likely to come up in searches, which may hinder an employee's search for help.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Human Resources should make its online resources intended to help employees address domestic violence concerns easier to find.

County websites on domestic violence are incomplete and lack safety features

Some county websites on domestic violence have incomplete information and none include recommended safety features, which may prevent or deter employees from using those resources and getting help. We conducted a review of county websites on domestic violence, like those found on the Sheriff's Office, PAO, and Department of Public Health's sites, which are intended for the public, but may be used by employees seeking assistance. While these pages contain potentially helpful information, some of these pages contain broken links or are still under construction, and none of these pages contain recommended safety features. The National Network to End Domestic Violence recommends that agencies take steps to ensure websites contain accurate information, alerts to remind users about internet safety, and quick escape buttons that would quickly navigate users to a more generic page such as a search engine.

Given the potential importance of the information on these sites to people with domestic violence concerns, these agencies need to ensure that online resources are functional and safe. As part of this audit, we sent memos to each of these agencies detailing our review of their sites, identifying broken links, and highlighting missing information. KCIT and the King County Web Governance Committee can also provide guidance and solutions to web content managers to help ensure agencies are able to adopt recommended practices for domestic violence-related sites, but have not yet developed this guidance.

Recommendation 8

King County Information Technology should develop and communicate guidance to county agencies for webpages on domestic violence.

Employee awareness is essential, but not promoted

Employee awareness of the County's policy and available resources is important because it helps to build an environment where people may be more willing to disclose and seek assistance when they need it, but the County provides limited materials to help raise awareness. HR managers are worried about employee awareness, which they identified as a key potential barrier for more people seeking assistance. This is important because 45 percent of supervisors we surveyed who have handled a domestic violence concern said they learned about the concern because the employee came to the supervisor to talk about it. Communicating with employees is one of the core steps of implementing a policy, particularly for employees who have specific obligations within the policy. DHR reported that awareness materials were distributed after the policy was created in 2006, but, as of January 2019, have been limited to occasional newsletter articles and there are no print materials available. Without awareness of the County's policy and employee rights and expectations, fewer employees may be willing or aware that they can disclose and seek help. Some HR managers reported they would like to have materials they could post or hand out to employees to raise regular awareness of the policy and resources available for support, which would help ensure employees feel more comfortable reaching out.

Recommendation 9

In order to ensure that all employees are aware of and understand available resources and their role in the response to domestic violence in the workplace, the Department of Human Resources should create and disseminate domestic violence awareness materials, including print and online informational materials as well as making training available.

Conclusion

The County is moving toward more proactive policies and practices, most recently through its adoption of a new policy related to sexual harassment in the workplace. Executive and DHR leadership have stated that new approaches should be preventive and should improve workplace culture and employee well-being, so that employees feel safe disclosing concerns and can receive assistance. Experts we spoke to during the audit noted that domestic violence experienced by employees can be more effectively addressed through a similar proactive, holistic approach. Implementing the recommendations in this report as part of the Executive's commitment to improving workplace culture and providing training opportunities could help better support employees, and their managers and supervisors, improve safety and well-being.

Appendix A: Supervisor Survey

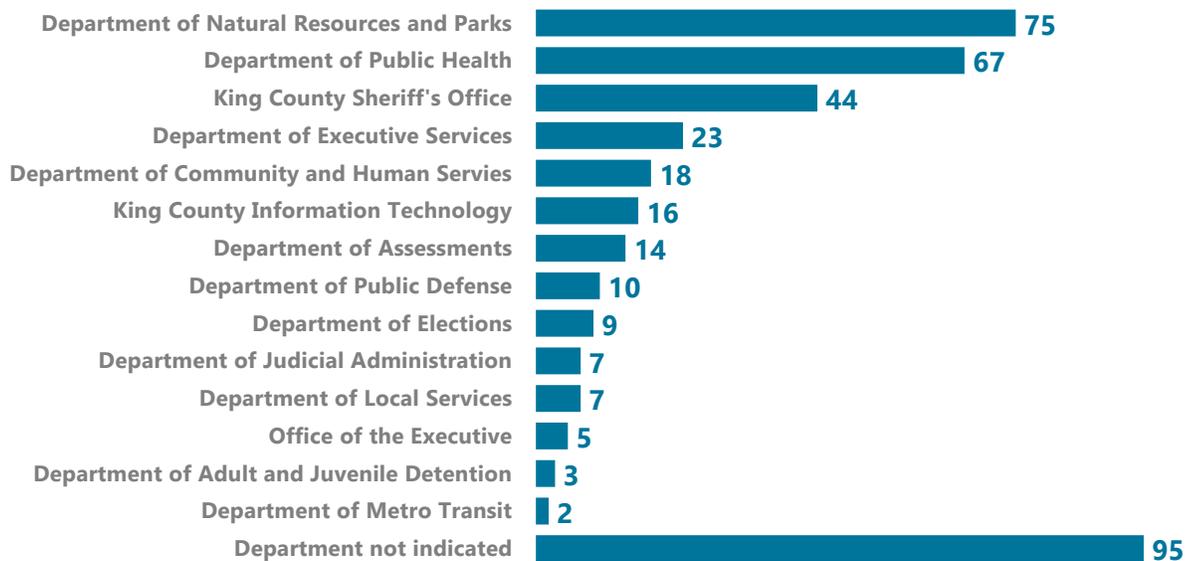
We developed a survey to gather information from supervisors from across King County to better understand how they are addressing domestic violence concerns, their knowledge of the domestic violence policy, and their thoughts on King County’s response to these concerns. Given the key role that supervisors play in addressing domestic violence in the workplace, it was important that we understood their experience with, and understanding of, the County’s Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy. Domestic violence concerns may not regularly be reported to human resources or other leadership. Employees may disclose these experiences to supervisors instead of human resources. This survey helped us to better identify how often domestic violence concerns are disclosed by county employees, as well as to assess supervisor confidence in their role addressing these concerns.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

We sent the survey to supervisors across King County’s executive agencies.⁸ The survey was sent to supervisors within these agencies via the agencies’ human resources managers, and was distributed to agency supervisors in December 2018 and January 2019. Human resources managers identified supervisor email addresses and distributed the survey to all supervisors in the agency they could identify. The survey achieved a 27 percent response rate; we received 395 total responses out of a total of 1,487 supervisors from 14 agencies.

We analyzed responses to closed-ended survey questions for basic descriptive statistics and crosstabs. We coded responses to open-ended survey questions based on themes, and these themes were used for the results discussed in the report.

FIGURE 1: Total responses received by agency



⁸ We did not send the survey to supervisors in the Department of Human Resources given their role in assisting other departments with domestic violence concerns as it could lead to duplication in our survey counts.

SURVEY RESULTS

Below is a selection of survey questions and results that are referenced in the body of this report.⁹

FIGURE 2: Have you ever been made aware that an employee you were supervising was experiencing a domestic violence concern?

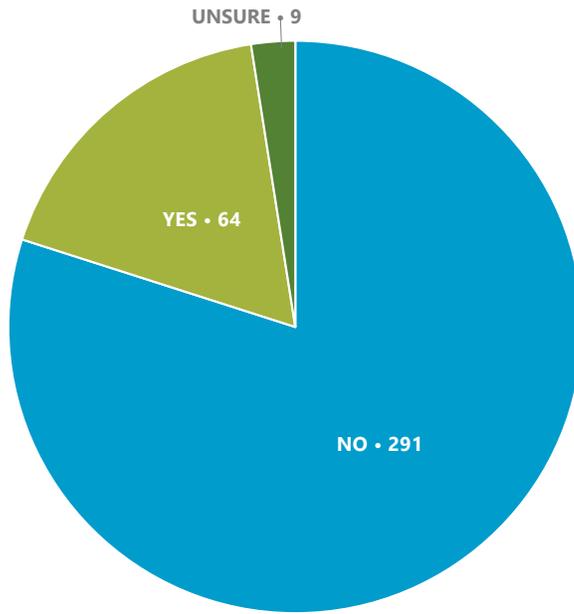
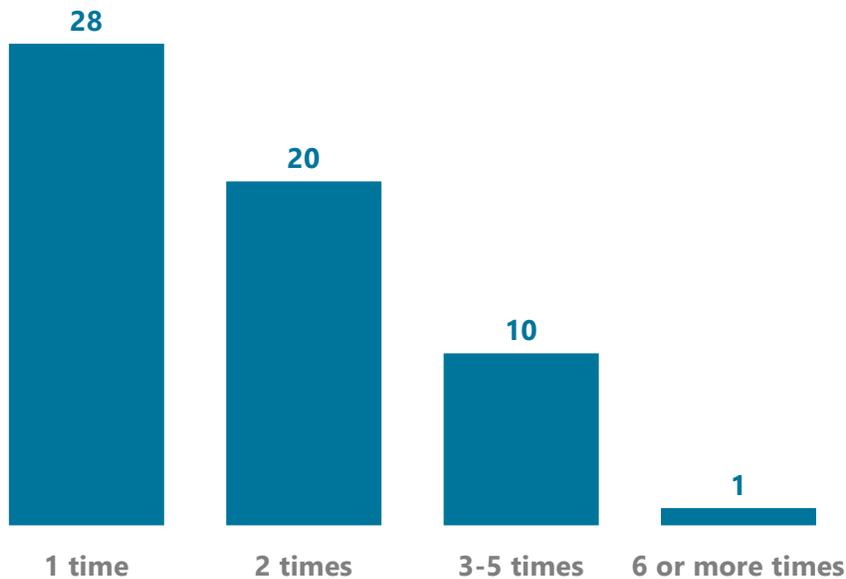


FIGURE 3: How many times has this (a domestic violence concern) occurred for employees you have supervised?



⁹ Because some respondents did not answer every question, not all questions have responses equal to the number of total survey responses.

FIGURE 4: How did you first find out about the domestic violence concern?

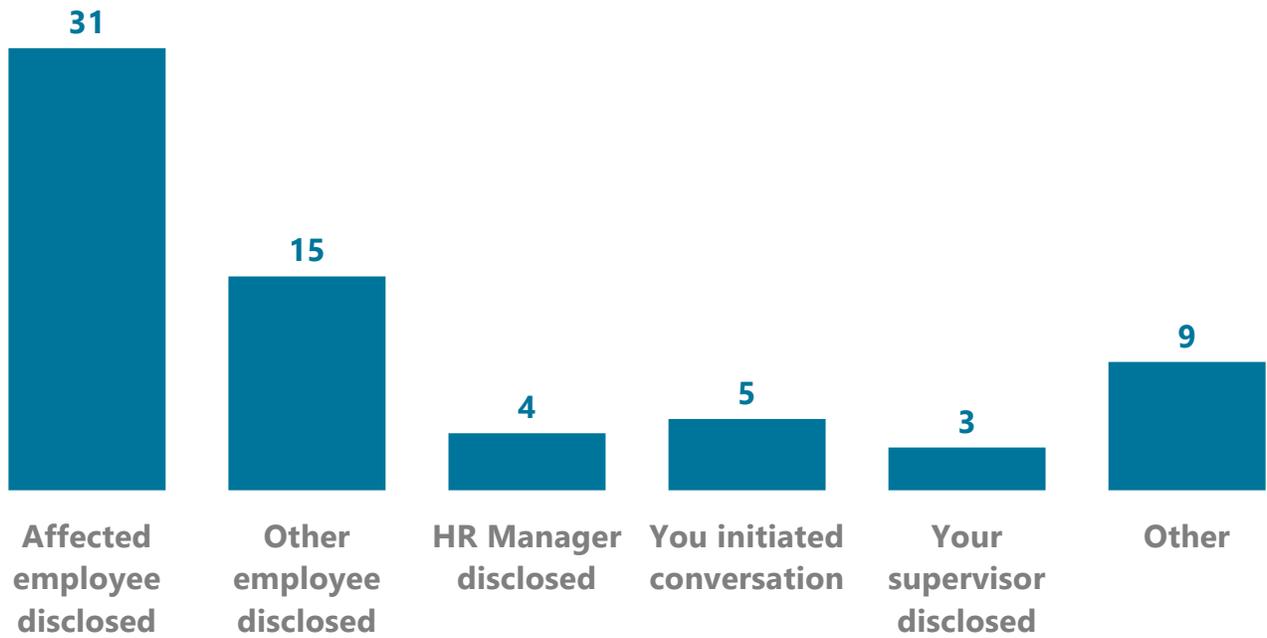


FIGURE 5: What, if anything, has ever prevented you from raising an employee's domestic violence concern to someone above you? (Select all that apply)

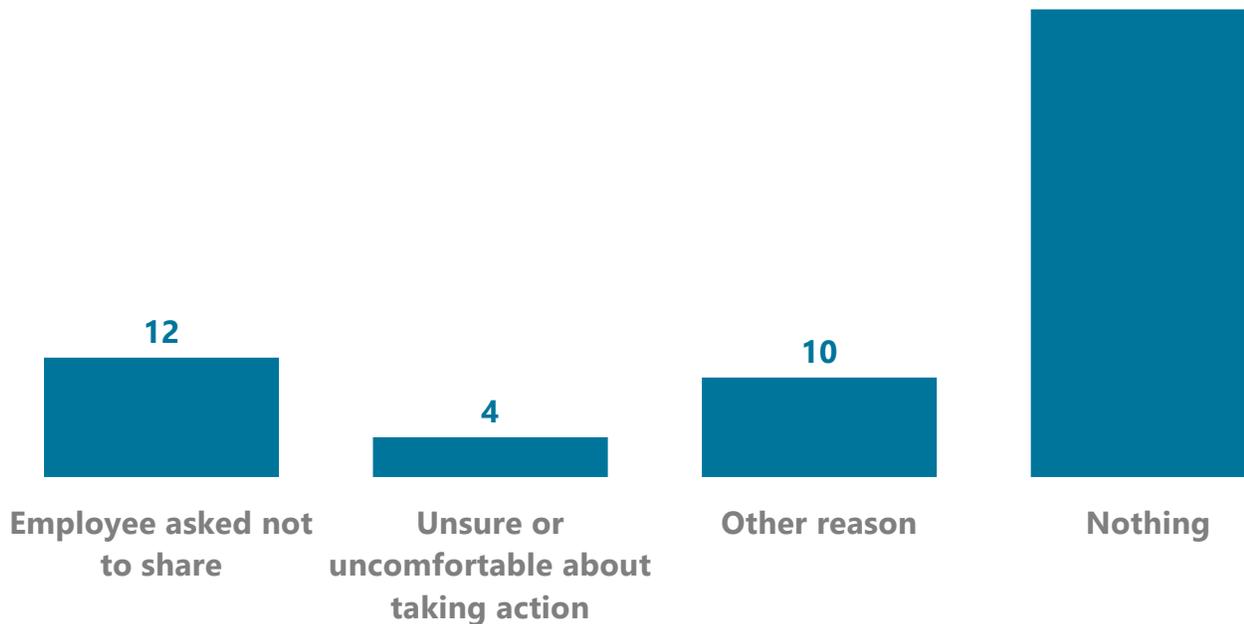


FIGURE 6: Have you ever read King County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy?

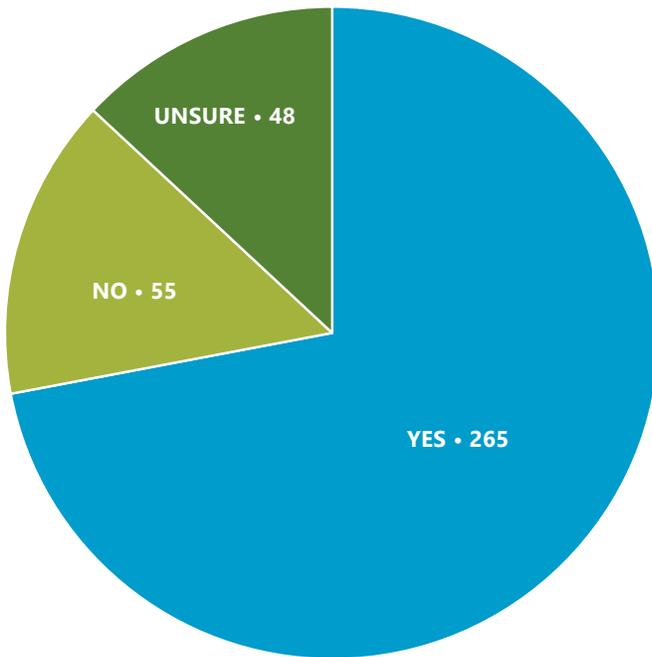


FIGURE 7: Have you ever received training on this policy outside of employee orientation?

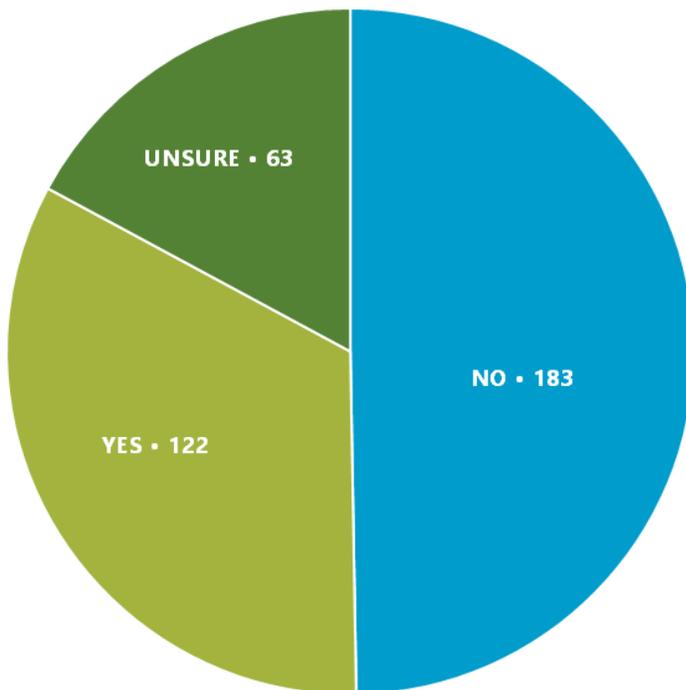
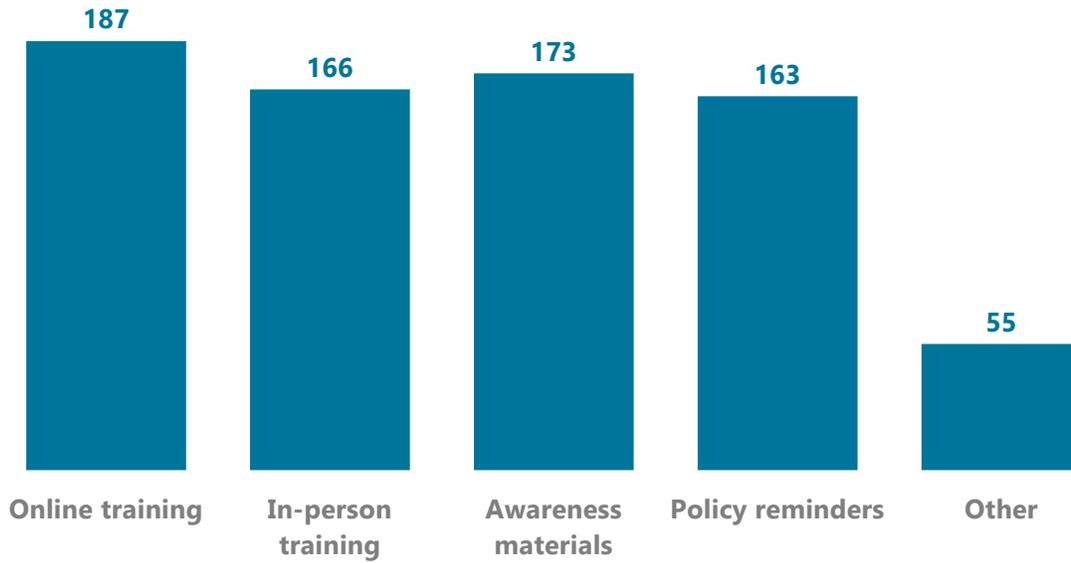


FIGURE 8: What, if anything, would help you feel better-equipped to be able to recognize or support an employee experiencing domestic violence? (Select all that apply)



Executive Response



King County

Dow Constantine

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March 18, 2019

KING COUNTY AUDITOR
MARCH 19, 2019
RECEIVED

Kymer Waltmunson
King County Auditor
Room 1033
COURTHOUSE

Dear Ms. Waltmunson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed final report on Domestic Violence Resources for Employees at King County. I appreciate the Auditor's Office's role in promoting and improving policies and operational practices in the county. I also appreciate the professionalism and collaboration of your staff with executive branch employees throughout the audit process.

King County has a Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy that makes it clear that we will not tolerate acts of domestic violence in the workplace, and encourages employees at risk to seek help. I concur that our policy could use an update and that we want to ensure that employees are able to find useful resources. Additionally, I appreciate the acknowledgement in your report that the fact that we have a policy is notable among employers in the United States.

I am committed to investing in our employees, and providing our employees with a safe workplace is critical. While you correctly point out that our policy has not been updated since 2006, the policy fairly accurately reflects the process that is recommended for assisting employees with domestic violence situations. That said, it could be clearer that our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is the first line resource for supervisors and employees. Reinforcing this procedure will create a more organized and informed response system for employees experiencing domestic violence.

I appreciate that based on the handbook, it may appear that we have outdated or insufficient resources for employees; however, the reality of what assistance we provide employees is impressive.

We currently have an incident response team that consists of employees from the Department of Human Resources, EAP; King County Security; the Prosecuting Attorney's Office; the Office of Labor Relations; the Office of Risk Management Services; the employee's



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management and HR Manager; and the Courthouse Marshall and/or Transit police, when appropriate. The team analyzes the situation and quickly develops a safety plan for the employee and assigns responsibility for each task. Example elements of a safety plan include:

- Granting the employee access to parking within their building;
- A security escort to and from the employee's mode of transportation;
- A change in work location;
- A change in work hours;
- Removing the employee from the online directory;
- Posting pictures of the threatening person and not allowing them into the workplace;
- Granting the employee domestic violence leave; and
- Helping the employee secure a protection order.

After the safety plan is set, subsequent meetings of the team are scheduled as needed to provide updates on the situation.

The employee is also referred to EAP for additional assistance. EAP is a free county resource that provides all county employees with counseling and coaching, including for instances of domestic violence. Our EAP providers have master's degrees in counseling and are licensed mental health counselors. As trained and licensed counselors, our EAP providers know that each domestic violence situation is different and that the individual factors should be considered in each instance. In addition to assisting with the workplace safety plan for the employee, EAP will do a number of other things to help with the employee's safety outside of work. Potential actions include:

- Assisting the employee with obtaining a protection order, if not already done so through a workplace safety plan;
- Counseling the employee on what to do with the protection order once they receive it;
- Advising the employee that they should go to a shelter and assisting the employee with locating and getting into one;
- Guiding the employee on how to look at the different aspects of their daily life and routine and how to create a safety plan around those activities; and
- Recommending that the employee seek counseling either through Making Life Easier (another free benefit for employees) or through a provider of the employee's choice, and supporting the employee through the process.

We will be updating the policy and handbook to better reflect our actual practice. When doing so we plan to make it clear that supervisors should only assist with putting workplace safety plans into place and that they should always refer the employee to EAP for additional resources. This will ensure that professional counselors are the ones who further assist the employee with what is needed in the employee's particular situation.

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March 18, 2019
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Again, I would like to extend my appreciation to the audit team for collaborating on this important work. If you have any questions regarding our audit response, please contact Adrienne Leslie, Deputy Director, Department of Human Resources, at 206-477-6010.

Sincerely,



Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: Rachel Smith, Deputy Executive, King County Executive Office (KCEO)
Casey Sixkiller, Chief Operating Officer, KCEO
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget
Shannon Braddock, Deputy Chief of Staff, KCEO
Jay Osborne, Director, Department of Human Resources (DHR)
Adrienne Leslie, Deputy Director, DHR

Recommendation 1

The Department of Human Resources should ensure that county supervisors and managers have access to training that provides them with the information they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence.

Agency Response

Concurrence **Concur**

Implementation date 1st Quarter 2020

Responsible agency **DHR**

Comment We agree that supervisors and managers should have access to training that provides them with the information that they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence. DHR is in the process of developing a new supervisor training which will include how to respond to instances of domestic violence. This will include who the supervisor should contact to put a workplace safety plan in place for the employee and clear direction to refer the employee to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP will assist with the workplace safety plan, and will assist the employee with a protection order, housing, and counseling, etc., as needed. EAP employs licensed counselors who are professionally trained to support victims of domestic violence and who have expert knowledge of what to do and have access to current resources. This allows EAP to assist employees based on the employee's specific needs.

Regarding concerns that work-related and performance issues may stem from domestic violence, when addressing performance issues it is standard practice to inform the employee that both EAP and Making Life easier are available to the employee for free if there are issues in their personal life that are impacting the employee's work. We will reiterate that in the supervisor training.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees the County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy to reflect current county priorities and information on resources and ensure the policy is updated as required by executive policy.

Agency Response

Concurrence **Concur**

Implementation date	4 th Quarter 2019
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	The current policy fairly accurately reflects the process that is recommended for assisting employees with domestic violence situations. That said, it should be clearer that our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is the first line resource for supervisors and employees. We will also reinforce that supervisors should only assist with putting workplace safety plans into place and that they should always refer the employee to EAP for additional resources. This will ensure that the professional counselors are the ones who further assist the employee with what is needed in the employee's particular situation. This will create a more organized and informed response system for employees experiencing domestic violence.

Additionally, DHR will work with our communications team to deploy periodic communications to remind employees that EAP is available to assist them with domestic violence issues and that King County is prepared to put safety plans into place when needed.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees its domestic violence in the workplace handbook and regularly ensure that its contents are up-to-date.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	1 st Quarter 2020
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	DHR is committed to ensuring that employees and supervisors are aware of current domestic violence policies, procedures and resources and that these are up-to-date, as outlined in Recommendations #1, #2, #7, and #9.

Recommendation 4

The Department of Human Resources should work with key agencies to establish and maintain contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns, and make that information available to employees.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	4 th Quarter 2019
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	As stated in recommendation #2, employees will be referred to EAP, who will then provide key agencies and resources to employees. EAP will ensure those resources are up to date.

Recommendation 5

In order to ensure the varying needs of employees can be met, the Department of Human Resources should ensure guidance on domestic violence in the workplace includes information about job-specific challenges.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	1 st Quarter 2020
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	We agree that we do need to update the policy and guidance to accurately reflect the work of the incident response team and EAP, who both work to address the employee's specific situation and any job-specific challenges.

Recommendation 6

The Department of Human Resources should ensure updates to the policy, handbook, and other resources are responsive to intersections between domestic violence and equity issues.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	1 st Quarter 2020
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	The complexity of dealing with domestic violence situations across cultures is part of the reason that we will make clear to supervisors that EAP is the first line resource for supervisors and employees. This will ensure that the professional counselors are the ones who assist the employee with what is needed in the particular employee's situation. As licensed counselors, they are well versed in the specific challenges faced by minorities, immigrants, refugees, disabled persons, and the LGBTQ communities. In addition to creating a more organized and informed response system for employees experiencing domestic violence, it will ensure that all employees get the assistance that they need.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Human Resources should make its online resources intended to help employees address domestic violence concerns easier to find.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
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Implementation date	1 st Quarter 2020
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	There is an entire section on Violence (workplace and domestic) on DHR's Policy website, which includes both the policy and the handbook. However, it is clear from the audit that this location is not always intuitive for employees. Therefore, we will think about how we can make it easier for employees to find. Additionally, EAP will make a DV specific page on its website.

Recommendation 8

King County Information Technology should develop and communicate guidance to county agencies for webpages on domestic violence.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	9/30/2019
Responsible agency	KCIT
Comment	KCIT will implement an online portal and backend tracking system. The resources for the county will exist in one central location and provide one voice to employees. In addition, KCIT will provide guidance to county agencies on how to provide a seamless experience for customers looking for information.

Recommendation 9

In order to ensure that all employees are aware of and understand available resources and their role in the response to domestic violence in the workplace, the Department of Human Resources should create and disseminate domestic violence awareness materials, including print and online informational materials as well as making training available.

Agency Response

Concurrence	Concur
Implementation date	1st Quarter 2020
Responsible agency	DHR
Comment	We agree that we should disseminate materials to educate employees about both the incident response team and about the resource assistance provided by EAP and Making Life Easier. Furthermore, in addition to the supervisor training, we will evaluate potential trainings that could be made available to all employees via Skillsoft.



Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objective & Methodology

Statement of Compliance with Government Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Scope of Work on Internal Controls

We assessed internal controls relevant to the audit objectives. This included interviews with knowledgeable staff across King County in the Department of Human Resources and within each of King County's Executive agencies. We also reviewed domestic violence related policies, procedures, and guidelines. In performing our audit work, we identified concerns relating to accessibility and completeness of vital information needed to consistently address domestic violence in the workplace.

Scope

This performance audit evaluated the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and elements of its implementation as it relates to employees who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence across Executive county agencies and entities.

Objectives

The initial objectives of this audit were the following:

1. To what extent does the King County Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy meet current best practices and requirements?
2. To what extent do key actors in King County know what to do when domestic violence affects the workplace, and what barriers do they face in providing support to employees?
3. How effectively and equitably does King County address additional risk factors such as remote locations or language barriers?

Methodology

To understand the extent to which the King County Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy meets current best practices and requirements, we reviewed King County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and handbook, as well as other relevant King County policies. We also reviewed local and state laws and regulations relating to domestic violence in the workplace. To understand specific domestic violence policy best practices we interviewed domestic violence advocacy organizations, reviewed several model domestic violence in the workplace policies, and reviewed human resources articles on addressing domestic violence in the workplace. We also reviewed the King County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy and handbook, as well as county websites for outdated or inaccurate information.

To understand how much key actors in King County know about how to address domestic violence in the workplace relative to their role, and the barriers they face to do so, we interviewed the Employee Assistance Program, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the Department of Human Resources, the Facilities Management Division, and the Department of Information Technology. We also interviewed the human resources managers from all King County Executive agencies. In these interviews we asked human resources managers about whether their department had specific barriers to effective domestic violence response, such as remote locations or employees who work at night. Lastly, we distributed a survey to a total of 1,487 supervisors within these entities which included questions about their experience with domestic violence concerns in the workplace. The survey received 395 responses.

To assess the accessibility of county employee domestic violence resources we conducted website user testing of online resources and documented resources testers found difficult to find. As part of this process we had five people conduct domestic violence concern-related tasks such as finding guidance for a coworker experiencing domestic violence or obtaining a protection order.



List of Recommendations & Implementation Schedule

Recommendation 1

The Department of Human Resources should ensure that county supervisors and managers have access to training that provides them with the information they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By providing supervisors and managers with access to appropriate training, DHR can ensure that management fully understands their role in addressing domestic violence in the workplace and have the knowledge and tools to effectively do so.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees the County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy to reflect current county priorities and information on resources and ensure the policy is updated as required by executive policy.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 4th Quarter 2019

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By updating the County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy, DHR can ensure that the policy includes accurate information on resources and reflects the county's commitment to employee well-being.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees its Domestic Violence in the Workplace handbook and regularly ensure that its contents are up-to-date.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By regularly updating the domestic violence in the workplace handbook and ensuring employees are aware of the handbook, DHR can ensure that employees have accurate and relevant resources they can review and use if they have concerns about domestic violence.

Recommendation 4

The Department of Human Resources should work with key agencies to establish and maintain contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns, and make that information available to employees.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 4th Quarter 2019

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By establishing and maintaining contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns, DHR can help ensure key agencies are poised to address safety concerns and establish safety plans as quickly as possible.

Recommendation 5

In order to ensure the varying needs of employees can be met, the Department of Human Resources should ensure guidance on domestic violence in the workplace includes information about job-specific challenges.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By including guidance on job-specific challenges in guidance on domestic violence, DHR can help responsible actors to be more prepared to handle common challenges to effective employee safety planning.

Recommendation 6

The Department of Human Resources should ensure updates to the policy, handbook, and other resources are responsive to intersections between domestic violence and equity issues.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By ensuring that updates to the domestic violence policy, handbook, and other resources recognize and incorporate intersections between domestic violence and equity issues, DHR can help ensure that all employees, regardless of background and personal circumstances, are equally served by county efforts to address domestic violence.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Human Resources should make its online resources intended to help employees address domestic violence concerns easier to find.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By making its online resources intended to help employees address domestic violence concerns easier to find, DHR can ensure that employees are able to use the domestic violence related resources they provide.

Recommendation 8

King County Information Technology should develop and communicate guidance to county agencies for webpages on domestic violence.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 9/30/2019

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By developing and communicating guidance to county agencies for webpages that contain information related to domestic violence, KCIT can help ensure that county-managed webpages follow recommended practices and are up-to-date, which will allow users to access those sites more safely.

Recommendation 9

In order to ensure that all employees are aware of and understand available resources and their role in the response to domestic violence in the workplace, the Department of Human Resources should create and disseminate domestic violence awareness materials, including print and online informational materials as well as making training available.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 1st Quarter 2020

ESTIMATE OF IMPACT: By creating and disseminating domestic violence awareness materials to county employees, DHR can raise awareness about available resources and help cultivate a culture in which affected employees feel more comfortable seeking help from the County.



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

Advancing Performance & Accountability

KYMBER WALTMUNSON, KING COUNTY AUDITOR

MISSION Promote improved performance, accountability, and transparency in King County government through objective and independent audits and studies.

VALUES INDEPENDENCE - CREDIBILITY - IMPACT

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This audit product conforms to the GAGAS standards for independence, objectivity, and quality.