



We improve systems so they work for survivors and the community.

*"It's really important for me to feel like my voice matters...like they're actually listening and they want to solve the situation and work on it together."
- local survivor*

Commission members use their expertise to **inform projects** and influence to **champion systems change**.

Commission meetings are spaces for learning, discussion, and committing to action.

2025 meeting topics:

- Findings and recommendations from **survivor input** on healthcare, civil court processes, missing and murdered indigenous people, and intimate partner homicides
- Supporting **criminalized survivors**
- Engaging with **Justice for Families** project
- Developing 2025 **Commission work plan**

Trainings for Community Partners

Stalking Prevention & Response Trainings

90 people attended a multi-disciplinary training focused on **criminal legal responses**

30 community- and systems-based advocates participated in a 3-part training series focused on **advocacy support, risk, and safety planning**

60 people attended a training focused on **campus safety and response**

Trainings for Schools

110 people attended half-day training on best practices for **supporting survivors in schools**; staff were present from all 7 public school districts and several private schools

50 people attended Pathways to Repair, a half-day workshop for school administrators and counselors, with a focus on using **restorative practices with students accused** of causing interpersonal harm

Trainings for Law Enforcement

Commission staff partnered with DVSAS to create and deliver training for all Bellingham police officers on **trauma-informed practices** for working with victims/survivors

Re-Imagining Justice

survivor-centered restorative justice
responses in Whatcom County

A collaboration of: Whatcom Dispute Resolution
Center (WDRC), Make.Shift Art Space, Western
Washington University, and experienced local
community accountability facilitators

Local survivors have said:

*“I wish community could have come together more
to talk about it and acknowledge what was
happening with him and even brainstorm how to
keep ourselves safe, how to keep people in the
community safe, and how to hold him
accountable.”*

*“It’s been such an on-going curiosity, what does
making this right look like?”*

*“If there was some kind of larger process, a larger
container around it, with support people in place,
then yes. Absolutely.”*

We have accomplished:

- Year-long learning series
- 40+ local survivor interviews
- Statewide presentations on our work
- Literature reviews of local, national, and international resources
- Consultation with similar programs
- Road map to implementation

Next steps:

- Choose core models and tools
- Develop documents and policies
- Train and support facilitators
- Create and implement outreach plan
- Shepherd one case through a restorative justice process



Whatcom County Summit on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People (MMIWP)

*“When people go missing, it is not random, it is
patterns that we choose to ignore.”*
keynote speaker Rep. Debra Lekanoff

*“We don’t have an update... We have little
information. In the meantime, the family hasn’t
stopped. They haven’t given up and they aren’t
going to.”*

family member of Besalynn James

*“I’m taking on responsibility and living it at the
same time...we should not be afraid on our land
that was stolen from us.”*

local student and Nooksack Tribal member

More than **180 people attended** the Summit
on MMIWP in 2025. **Every person who filled
out an evaluation said they would attend
again.**

The Summit included:

- Lummi Victims of Crime Shawl Ceremony
- Song of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women by Antone George
- Keynote Speaker Rep. Debra Lekanoff
- Survivor Panel
- Tribal Storytelling
- Keynote Speaker Dr. Aaron Payment
- Native Youth Panel

Healthcare Response Pilot Project

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), nearly **50% of survivors seek care in medical settings** before disclosing their abuse.

In 2023, our intimate partner homicide case review team recommended **providing healthcare providers with “tools, training, and response protocols to identify and support survivors,”** particularly in prenatal and maternal and child health settings.

What do local survivors say?

“They didn’t pressure me, it was more like how can we help you and how can we support you. They approached me with sensitivity and that was really helpful.”

“I didn’t see options, no one even asked me anything, no one did. No one asked if I needed help, ever, ever. It’s having options, I didn’t have options.”

“I didn’t know what to do or where to go...I did it all by myself and I felt a lot of shame for so long.”

Completed in 2025:

- Survivor interviews
- Provider surveys
- Report with findings and recommendations
- Training with Family Care Network practitioners

Next steps:

- Develop tools for patient screening and universal education, system-wide policy, practitioner training, and patient follow up procedures
- Identify local clinic(s) for pilot implementation

Justice for Families

Survivors are seeking **safety for themselves and their children**. While the protection order and family law processes offer legal remedies for the abuse they are experiencing, often **these processes do not meet survivors’ needs**. The Justice for Families project is **working to change that**.

“For me right now, I feel like I’m stuck in sinking sand and I’m unable to get out because I don’t know which ones to fill in, I don’t want to mess up, there’s so much hesitation and mistrust within myself, because I’m already facing a lot of fears moving into this. Not knowing what I’m doing moving into this is even more paralyzing.”
local survivor

Accomplishments with first full year of JFF funding:

- 13 survivor interviews
- Priority opportunities for action identified
- LAW Advocates provided free individualized, in-depth legal help to survivors seeking parenting plans; this level of support is not available anywhere else in our county
- An on-site DVSAS courthouse advocate helped 101 survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and stalking who were seeking protection orders

Ongoing areas of focus:

Meaningful language access
Disability justice
Survivor experiences and needs

Intimate Partner Homicide Case Review



*"[She] was a bright light... She touched people's lives. If she was your friend, it would be forever."
family member of DV homicide victim*

*"I was good for him, but he was not good for me."
DV homicide victim*

Key Findings and Ways Forward

- Not everyone uses words like domestic violence or sexual assault, even when they have experienced harm. We need to use **language that is broad and inclusive, so more people can recognize themselves** and seek support.
- The effects of domestic violence ripple outward, affecting many people, families, and communities. This highlights the importance of ensuring **care and support for all victims**.
- Mental health conditions do not excuse abuse. Responses should hold people accountable for violence and abuse while providing **mental health support that does not excuse harm**.
- **Deep, comprehensive, and on-going prevention education** is needed for all educational levels, pre-K through college. Topics should include consent and healthy relationships, rejection tolerance and healthy breakups, and local resources.

Who funds the Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence?

General Operating Funding

Whatcom County: \$90,000
City of Bellingham: \$90,000
City of Ferndale: \$5,000

Justice for Families Project Funding

U.S. Department of Justice,
Office on Violence Against Women:
\$600,000 for 36 months

Summit on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People

Mt. Baker Foundation
PeaceHealth Foundation
PeaceHealth Tribal Affinity Group
Community Consortium for Cultural Recognitions

Funding is for:

Commission on Sexual & Domestic Violence
DVSAS
LAW Advocates
Trainings for local court staff and court-aligned professionals



COMMISSION ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Inspiring and coordinating community efforts to address sexual and domestic violence

The Commission consists of 19 government and 16 community members. Government officials are designated by government positions. Community members are selected from among stakeholder agencies in the community.

Designated Government Representatives (19)

Name	Community Position	Term Expires
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>Designated Representative/Lummi Nation</i>	<i>01/31/2027</i>
Tammy Cooper-Woodrich	Designated Representative/Nooksack Tribe	01/31/2027
Champ Thomaskutty	Whatcom County Health and Community Services Director	N/A
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>Selected Representative, Whatcom Racial Equity Commission</i>	<i>01/31/2030</i>
David VanderYacht	Selected Superintendent-Whatcom Co. School Districts	01/31/2028
Jacqueline Brawley	Selected Representative, Whatcom Co. School Districts	01/31/2030
Elizabeth Hart	Co-Director/Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services	N/A
Alicia Solomon	Administrator, DSHS/Community Services Office	N/A
Deyettea Alexander	Area Administrator, DCYF, or Designated Representative	N/A
Greg Hansen	Designated Representative-Whatcom County Cities	01/31/2027
Gloria Garcia	Whatcom County Superior Court Administration	N/A
Jake Wiebusch	Whatcom County Probation Administrator	N/A
Tami Bennett	Bellingham Municipal Court Administrator	N/A
Eric Richey	Whatcom County Prosecutor	N/A
Starck Follis	Whatcom County Public Defender	N/A
Sarah Chaplin	Senior Assistant City Attorney	N/A
Donnell Tanksley	Whatcom County Sheriff	N/A
Rebecca Mertzig	Bellingham Police Chief	N/A
Rodger Funk	Selected Police Chief-Whatcom County Cities	01/31/2028

County Community Appointments (8)

Name	Community Position	Agency	Term Expires
Garret Shelsta	Community at Large	Consultant	01/31/2027
Moonwater	Human Service Provider	Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center	01/31/2027
Raquel Vernola	Institution of Higher Education	Whatcom Community College	01/31/2027
Heidi Bode	Human Service Provider	LAW Advocates	01/31/2028
Jessyca Murphy	Community at Large	Community Member	01/31/2029
Rosemarie Tom	SA/DV Victim Service Provider	Xwlemi Flicker: Public Safety Education	01/31/2030
Krista Touros	Health Care Provider	PeaceHealth/St. Joseph Medical Center	01/31/2030
Sukhmanjit Kaur	Community at Large	Unity Care Northwest	01/31/2030

City Community Appointments (8)

Name	Community Position	Agency	Term Expires
Christina Kobdich	Health Care Provider	Unity Care Northwest	01/31/2027
Chris Roselli	Institution of Higher Education	Western Washington University	01/31/2028
Katie Chandler	DV/SA Victim Service Provider	Lydia Place	01/31/2029
Annie Taylor	Human Service Provider	Annie Taylor Consulting	01/31/2029
Therese Horan	Community at Large	PeaceHealth/St. Joseph Medical Center	01/31/2029
Beth Boyd	Human Service Provider	PeaceHealth/St. Joseph Medical Center	01/31/2029
Christina Byrne	Community at Large	Western Washington University	01/31/2030
Michaela Vendiola	Community at Large	North Sound Accountable Communities of Health	01/31/2030



2026 Work Plan

Our work includes:

- Hosting meetings for learning, discussion, and action planning
- Developing resources and tools
- Providing professional education and training
- Gathering data from survivors, case reviews, and stakeholders
- Offering guidance and consultations on policies, practices, and/or individual cases

We work with:

- Schools
- Workplaces
- Healthcare providers
- Housing providers
- Media
- Faith communities
- Colleges/universities
- Legal systems
- Local government agencies

In all activities, we integrate a focus on:

- Racial, gender, and economic justice
- Language and disability access
- Public health and prevention frameworks
- Criminalized survivors
- Sexual violence, including within intimate relationships
- High lethality risk factors, including coercive control, stalking, post-separation violence, and strangulation

2026 Activities

- Expand restorative justice opportunities for people affected by domestic/sexual violence.
- Elevate strategies and resources for local responses to and prevention of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People and families.
- Collaborate with Whatcom County courts and aligned professionals to remove barriers to justice for survivors in civil and family law cases, particularly related to language and ability.
- Lead case reviews of Sexual Assault Protection Orders (SAPOs) to surface systemic barriers and advance survivor safety.
- Host community of practice to equip secondary school staff with tools and resources to intervene with students who cause sexual or relationship harm.
- Pilot Coaching Boys Into Men program to implement evidence-based prevention programming in youth sports.

Presentation for Whatcom County Council

June 23, 2026



COMMISSION
ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Inspiring and coordinating community efforts to address sexual and domestic violence

About the Commission



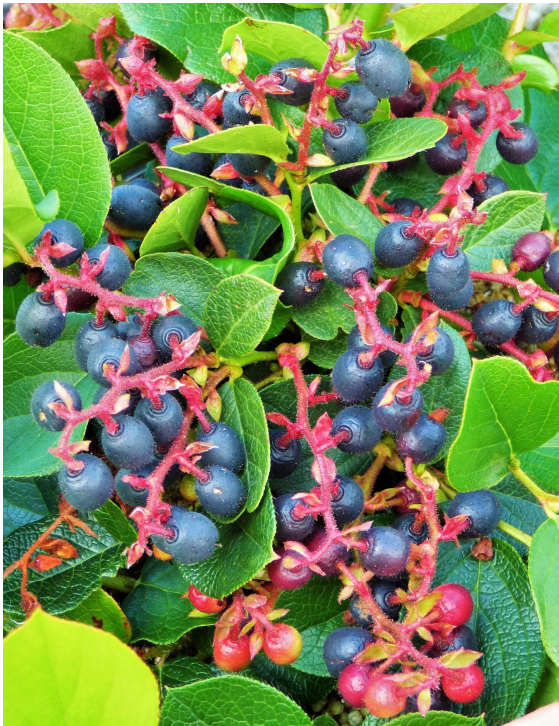
- The SA/DV Commission is a quasi-governmental organization formed in 1998 by a joint resolution between the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County.
- Purpose:
 - We improve systems so they work better for survivors and the community.
 - We do not provide direct services; we support those who do.

Commission Membership

Commission member positions include:

- Executive directors and leaders from non-profits, healthcare, public schools, colleges and universities, housing and human services
- Representatives from Lummi and Nooksack Tribes
- Representative from Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC)
- Police chiefs and sheriff, court and probation administrators, county attorney, public defender, and city attorney
- DCYF and DSHS administrators
- Elected officials

Commission Funding



- Whatcom County
- City of Bellingham
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)
- Sponsorships for Summit on MMIWP
 - Mt. Baker Foundation
 - Peace Health Foundation
 - Community Consortium for Cultural Recognitions (C3R)
 - Peace Health Tribal Affinity Group
 - WECU

Our work includes:

- ✓ Hosting meetings for learning, discussion, and action planning
- ✓ Developing resources and tools
- ✓ Providing professional education and training
- ✓ Gathering data from survivors, case reviews, and stakeholders
- ✓ Offering guidance and consultations on policies, practices, and/or individual cases

We are a resource for:

- ✓ Schools
- ✓ Workplaces
- ✓ Healthcare providers
- ✓ Media
- ✓ Housing providers
- ✓ Faith communities
- ✓ Colleges/universities
- ✓ Legal systems
- ✓ Advocates
- ✓ Local government agencies

We integrate a focus on:

- Racial, gender, and economic justice
- Language and disability access
- Public health and prevention frameworks
- Criminalized survivors
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Current projects

- Re-Imagining Justice
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People
- Justice for Families
 - SAPO Case Review
- Community of Practice for School Response
- Coaching Boys Into Men



Sexual Assault Protection Order (SAPO) Case Review

- 20-person multidisciplinary team reviewing 9 sexual assault protection orders
- Strengths in District Court
 - Partnerships and engagement
 - Recent increase in electronic communication
 - Communicating to all respondents that the petitioner/survivor does not want any contact in the future, regardless of whether order or denied



“...this person continues direct and indirect stalking and harassing by monitoring myself and husband to intimidate at work and local area. I don’t feel safe.” – SAPO petitioner/survivor

Sexual Assault Protection Order (SAPO) case review

- Findings

- Complex and time-consuming process
- Inconsistencies in judicial preparation for hearings
- Discrepancies in application of civil legal standard of preponderance of evidence
- High denial rate of temporary orders
- Limited analysis of how power differences affect consent and non-consent




“I am scared of going to court.” – SAPO petitioner/survivor

Sexual Assault Protection Order (SAPO) case review

- Opportunities

- Increase approval rates of temporary orders
- Ensure regular and sufficient judicial training in dynamics of sexual assault, neurobiology of trauma, and implicit bias
- Identify a system for the court to appoint attorneys to pro se petitioners/survivors
- Improve understanding of DVSAS support
- Increase meaningful language access and disability access

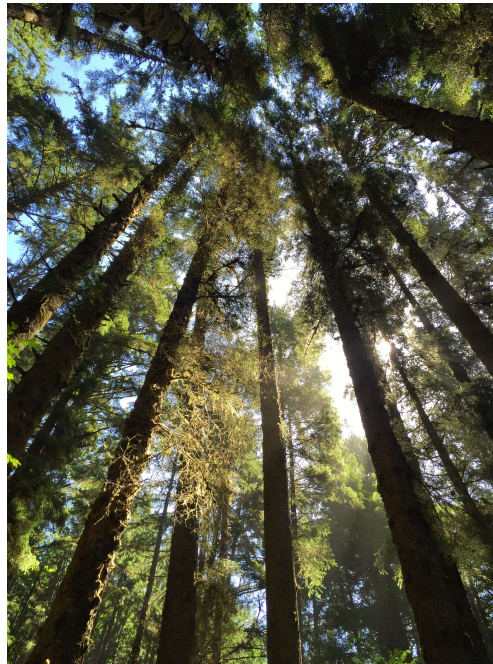


“Since the night of the assault, my life has changed. I am a completely different person...I feel unsafe leaving my home or even going outside...” – SAPO petitioner/survivor

Re-Imagining Justice for Survivors

Partners

- Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center (WDRC), Western Washington University, individual local consultants/facilitators
- Survivors



What we have done

- Learning series
- Survivor input
- Literature review
- Consultation with existing programs
- Road map to implementation
- Funding applications

Re-Imagining Justice for Survivors

Up next

- Final preparation to shepherd one “case” through an RJ process without additional funding (housed at WDRC)
- Pilot of one community-based “case” followed by evaluation
- Funding searches
- Collaborative conversations with County prosecution, public defense, and health/community services

“It’s been such an on-going curiosity, what does making this right look like?” – local survivor

Schools Prevention & Response

- Community of Practice
 - Three workshops per school year
 - Administrators, counselors, mental health and prevention specialists
 - Best practices for supporting survivors & accountability and repair for working with students accused of harm
- Coaching Boys Into Men (pilot)
 - Evidence based violence prevention program for high school coaches of young male athletes
- Judicial Officers & School leadership
 - Setting up protection orders to support safety in school setting



Schools Prevention & Response

You are invited to our July Commission meeting:

Thursday July 23, 2026

8:30-10:00am

@ Location TBD

Topic:

- Overview of school prevention & response efforts
- Gathering feedback and ideas to guide a local needs assessment to get more input from students, families, and staff in our communities



SAVE THE DATE!

2026 Whatcom County Summit on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People

**Thursday, November 5, 2026
8:30am - 5:00pm**

*"Stepping Up Together: Action Rooted in
Responsibility"*

PeaceHealth St. Luke's
Community Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway,
Bellingham

RSVP (not required) online
<https://www.dvcommission.org/mmiwp>
or call 360-671-5700 x1242



Questions or comments?

Susan Marks

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dvcommission.org



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