



Office of the Texas Governor Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force

Greetings -

We are delighted to bring you our September Newsletter, featuring the latest news and updates from the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force (SASTF).

In this issue, we introduce our new Program Coordinator, Jordann Jezek, and two of our newest Task Force members. We offer sincere gratitude for our SASTF Summer Intern, Addison Simons, and former Task Force member, Brad Watson.

Survivor Leader, Larissa Martinez, shares her experience in an article titled, "An Illusion of Justice." Thank you, Larissa, for using your voice to remind others their story isn't an illusion and to keep advocating and fighting!

The Crisis Center, serving Matagorda and Wharton Counties, is featured in the Community Efforts and Success section, for their collaborative work as an umbrella program in rural communities serving survivors of child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

Finally, we provide training opportunities related to victim interviewing and child abuse prevention.

Sincerely,

SASTF

New Staff Member

Jordann Jezek

Program Coordinator

Jordann Jezek joined the Office of the Governor in 2018 after graduating from Sam Houston State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice. Originally serving as the Program Coordinator for the Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT), Jordann now serves as the Program Coordinator for both the CSTT and the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force (SASTF) under the Trafficking and Sexual Violence Prevention Programs.

Outside of her passion for helping those in need, Jordann enjoys traveling as well as keeping active with her two Golden Retrievers, Bear and Blue.



New Task Force Members

Marcus Reese

Break the Silence

Marcus Reese is a life-long resident of Taylor, Texas, and has been a certified tennis teaching professional since 2016. After picking up a racquet for the first time in 2010 his love for the sport quickly became an obsession. Dedicated to the tennis community, Reese serves as President of the Taylor Area Tennis Association (TATA) and helps fulfill the organization's mission of promoting tennis and making it inclusive to everyone.

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse for more than a decade Reese is sharing his story to prevent a similar fate to other vulnerable populations and be a light for other survivors and their families in their journey toward healing.

In 2023, he cofounded the Break the Silence project, an organization created to raise awareness of the sexual abuse of children and provide information on where to get help and support in and around Taylor, Texas.

Reese also serves as a member of Services for Male Survivors Working Group on the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force of Texas.





Mackenzie Gaussoin

Texas Military Department

Mackenzie Gaussoin is an early career social science program and policy analyst and member of the Society for Prevention Research. As a Fort Cavazos area resident of 12 years, military child, and military spouse, the case of PFC Vanessa Guillen sparked a fire within Gaussoin to put her passion for research-based policy advocacy to use in fighting sexual violence within the military. With this mission in mind, she joined the Integrated Prevention Advisory Group (IPAG) within the Department of the Army, on Fort Cavazos, TX. As a Prevention Implementation Specialist, Gaussoin served as one of the pioneers and original members of the Army's IPAG.

Gaussoin is currently working as a Sexual Violence Prevention Specialist for the Texas Military Department (TMD). At Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ), Camp Mabry, TX, Gaussoin acts as subject matter expert on Integrated Primary Prevention as applied to sexual violence prevention in the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Air National Guard, and Texas State Guard.

Gaussoin is a proud graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Public Policy.

Above all, Gaussoin is a mother to two brilliant young boys, military spouse, and proud Texan dedicated to improving the lives of Texan's and our military forces.

A Special Thank You!

DPS Joint Field Training Exercise

DPS Assistant Chief Derek Prestridge, Rebecca Vieh, DPS Track-Kit Program Specialist, along with SASTF staff, and CSTT staff attended the DPS' Joint Field Training Exercise in Florence, Texas on August 16th. Attendees had the opportunity to observe how Trooper Trainees implement skills learned from Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) training program. Attendees also had the opportunity to wish Melissa Atwood, former SASTF Policy Working Group member, farewell as she



retires after working over 17.5 years in state service. Thank you for your contributions to the Task Force and we wish you all the best, Melissa!

SASTF/CSTT Summer Intern: Addison Simons

We would like to extend a special thank you to Addison Simons, our Summer Intern, for her amazing work and contributions during her time working with us! Below Addison gives us a glimpse into her experience interning for the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force.

My name is Addison Simons, and I had the privilege of interning for both the CSTT and the SASTF at the Office of the Governor this summer. I grew up in the Austin area and am an incoming senior at UT, where I study Government with a minor in Social Work. During my time in the office, I attended numerous meetings and sat in on powerful conversations regarding sexual assault and human trafficking in the State of Texas. Most of my time was dedicated to the research phase of developing a Children-Adolescent Survivor Rights Guide; a topic I am honored to have had the opportunity to present at the July Quarterly Meeting of the SASTF. Coming into this experience, I was curious to see what survivor-centered and trauma-informed policy would look like. My attendance in numerous Task Force and Working Groups meetings has allowed me to have a better understanding to my initial questions. It truly has been an honor to intern here, and I look forward to seeing the continued impact of the CSTT and SASTF.

Brad Watson

We offer special thanks and appreciation to Brad Watson, former Task Force and Services for Male Survivors Working Group member for all he has contributed to the SASTF! Inspired by Brad's [story](#), the Task Force prioritized efforts to better serve and support male survivors. We have so much gratitude for Brad and wish him all the best in his future endeavors!

Survivor Voices

An Illusion of Justice

Written by Larissa Martinez - Executive Director of Circle of Arms, LMediation Solutions Contract Mediator, SA/Mental Health advocate, and member of the SASTF Survivor-Centered Working Group

Justice looks different for many people but for survivors of sexual assault and rape the word justice is something we rarely receive. For the past three years I was the petitioner of a military rape case that happened 20 something years ago but due to legislation that was

changed in the statute of limitations in the military UCMJ I was able to finally report. I didn't report at the time of the rape because I was young, threatened verbally and physically, manipulated, less than two years into my service enlistment, he was in a senior supervisor position (outranked me), and was 15 years older than me. The Air Force didn't have a sexual assault/rape reporting process or SART, and smart phones/social media wasn't heard of.

Only if you're a survivor can you truly understand the emotions of feeling empowered to bring your perpetrator to face justice mixed with the fear of reliving your trauma and not having expectations that the investigators, special counsel, and system will believe you. I was put through the wringer these past three years, with a disorganized system, let downs, being passed off to different places to retell my story, moments of hope only to be crushed, and the most impactful part of having people who're in charge making the decision in my case decide that the evidence, witnesses, and my story isn't enough for them to make a case.. They didn't test the DNA, didn't question, or interrogate him, nor did they put him through the emotional turmoil they did me, the survivor. I promised myself that I wouldn't let "them" bring me down and make me lose hope, but until you're in my shoes and any survivor's shoes can you really begin to know the raw, unfiltered pain.

To see our chance for justice blindly taken away and realize it as just an illusion created by the system is morally and ethically wrong. I went down a dark spiral and wasn't myself. I didn't believe I had any strength left or believe I could honestly tell other survivors that they would receive fair justice so it's not worth it to report. This was me in a very dark moment but only briefly.

I'm glad I was able to pull myself out of the dark and remember who I am! I am not an illusion, my story isn't an illusion, survivors aren't an illusion!

We're here in the light advocating, resilient, and brave! We may cry in the dark by ourselves, but we won't stay in the dark for long. We will fight with all our might, power, and knowledge to ensure justice isn't an illusion any longer!

This is to all the survivors out there whose justice was an illusion in the legal system because your story didn't fit into their "box" of what a survivor should look and be like. Your story isn't an illusion, keep fighting and keep being the light for yourself and others.

Community Efforts and Successes



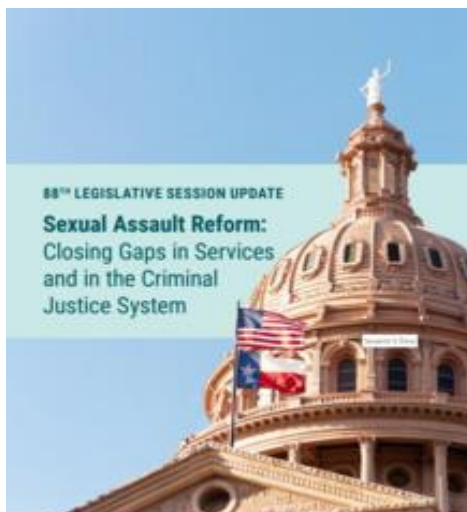
The Crisis Center covering Matagorda and Wharton Counties has continuously expanded programming over the past several years to overcome the deficits associated with serving a rural area with limited resources. The Crisis Center is an umbrella program that serves survivors of child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault. In 2020, the

Center conducted a community assessment survey along with an internal survey of their programs to better understand how they could expand programming and provide a holistic approach to victim services. After the survey was completed, the Crisis Center discovered that survivors were left with many unmet needs. Shortly thereafter, the Crisis Center initiated several new programs and services including, partnering with Texas Forensic Nursing Examiners (TXFNE) to open a forensic medical examination facility, a childcare facility for survivors, a legal services program that provides free family law assistance for survivors, and the expansion of mental health services including a bilingual therapist who is able to provide trauma focused therapy to Spanish speaking clients. There is no doubt that the Crisis Center's expansion is not over, it has just begun. The employees, leadership team, and board members are continually finding innovative ways to provide new services to survivors in this rural community. Rural community services don't have to mean limited services, especially in a community filled with people dedicated to serving.

[Shelter Program Video](#)

[Crisis Center CAC Program Video](#)

Resources



88th Legislative Session Update

Sexual Assault Reform: Closing Gaps in Services and in the Criminal Justice System

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault's Policy and Legal team proudly presents this [legislative summary](#), highlighting new laws from the 88th Legislative Session that will most directly impact the work done on behalf of sexual assault survivors in Texas.

Training Opportunities

Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) Training Course

Texas Department of Public Safety

- October 3-4: Beaumont, Texas
- October 17-18: Laredo, Texas

Pre-registration for these trainings are currently closed but if you are interested in enrolling, please email IPC@dps.texas.gov

Collaborative Response to Domestic Violence in Rural Communities

Institute for Community Coordinated Response in Partnership with Conference on Crimes Against Women

October 2-3, 2023

[Register for this Conference](#)

Creating a Community Action Plan for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

National Criminal Justice Training Center

October 24-25, 2023

[Register for this Training](#)

Comprehensive Victim Interviewing (CVI): Helping Victims Retrieve and Disclose Traumatic Memories

End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI)

October 25-26, 2023

Fee associated with this training - \$299

[Register for this Training](#)

