



Office of the Texas Governor Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force

Greetings,

We are excited to present the September edition of the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force (SASTF) newsletter, filled with the latest updates and news. In this issue, we spotlight Task Force member Megan Bermea and introduce our newest staff member, Makaela Gude, along with new Task Force members Chief Jerry Meadors and Liz Wiggins.

We also highlight the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) Conference, where Chief Meadors, received TAASA's Harold Cottle Award, and Leticia Manzano, SASTF Survivor Leader, received TAASA's Vivian Miles Award. Finally, we offer special thanks to former Task Force members, Investigator Kristina Gonzalez and Deepika Modali, for their invaluable contributions.

This issue also features a powerful article from Leticia Manzano titled "*I am a Survivor and Advocate*," reminding us all of the importance of survivor voices in our mission. In our Community Efforts and Successes section, we showcase the impactful SANE Simulation Training led by Jenny Black, Director of Forensic Nursing at SAFE Alliance – Eloise's House.

Finally, don't miss the upcoming training opportunities, including the first annual Crime Victim's Institute Conference, SASTF's October Webinar, and Texas Department of Public Safety's Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) Training. We are grateful for your ongoing dedication and contributions to supporting survivors across Texas!

Sincerely,
The SASTF Team

New Staff Member

Makaela Gude

Program Coordinator for the Trafficking and Sexual Violence Prevention Programs

Hi everyone, I am Makaela Gude and I am thrilled to introduce myself as part of this amazing team! I am from North Houston, from a small suburban town named New Caney, Texas. I recently graduated in May from Texas State University with a degree in Criminal Justice and a minor in Forensic Psychology. In my last semester, I had the incredible opportunity to intern with the National Juvenile Justice Society, a victims advocacy nonprofit network, where I worked as a Project Management and Research Intern. Following graduation, I joined the Office of the Governor as an intern for Texas Crime Stoppers, leading to my current role as the Program Coordinator for the Trafficking and Sexual Violence Prevention Programs. This is my first position as a postgraduate, and I am excited to embark on this journey with all of you. I look forward to contributing to our team and learning from each of you.



New Task Force Members



Chief Jerry Meadors

Rockdale Police Department

Jerry Meadors is a 25-year veteran of Texas Law Enforcement, currently serving as Chief of the Rockdale Police Department. After graduating from the police academy in 1995, Chief Meadors worked as a patrol officer with Thorndale Police Department and Cameron Police Department before being promoted to Detective. Chief Meadors also served as a patrol officer, field training officer, firearms instructor and later, criminal investigator with the Huntsville Police Department. Prompted by a marked increase in online crimes against children, Chief Meadors enrolled in the Digital Forensic

Concepts Program at Sam Houston State University, where he earned his Advanced Digital Forensics Certification. In 2008, Chief Meadors was recruited to join the Office of the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit within the Criminal Investigations Division and was promoted to Major in 2017, where he oversaw the Child Exploitation, Fugitive Apprehension, Digital Forensics, Fraud, Money Laundering, Organized Crime, Public Integrity, Elections Fraud, Prosecutor Assistance, and Facilities Security Units. Realizing his desire to re-enter local law enforcement, Chief Meadors joined the Hutto Police Department in 2018 and was sworn in as Rockdale, Texas' Chief of Police in 2020. Noticing a severe lack of resources existed for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence in Rockdale and Milam County, Chief Meadors partnered with the District Attorney's Office and joined a fellowship program with the "Institute for Coordinated Community Response."



Elizabeth "Liz" Wiggins

Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation

Liz Wiggins is an Enforcement Prosecutor with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation where she focuses on the intersection of human trafficking and the Texas massage industry. Her career journey includes experience as a former criminal prosecutor and former criminal defense attorney, experience with the intersection of mental health and the justice system, and experience providing legal services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. Liz has a passion for public service and volunteers on the board of two nonprofits. She loves learning new things and recently became a podcast creator and host. She is a mother of 6 and grandmother of 2. She is a survivor of

child sexual assault and a family member to several sexual assault survivors. She joined the SASTF's Survivor-Centered Working Group in the Summer of 2023, with a desire to be a part of meaningful change in the system response to sexual assault survivors.

Task Force Member Spotlight

Megan Bermea, MPA, CTCM

Health and Human Services Commission

Megan Bermea serves as the Program Director for the Office of Family Services at the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) in Austin, Texas. She provides strategic vision and trauma-informed leadership to the Family Violence Program, Child Advocacy Program, and Human Trafficking Resource Center to support survivors of complex trauma and the provider network that serves them.

She is an appointed member of the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors Task Force, the Attorney General's Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force and Coordinating Council, and HHSC's Trauma Transformation Team. She is also a graduate of the HHS Executive Leadership Academy, cohort 14.



Ms. Bermea is a summa cum laude graduate of The University of Texas at El Paso with a bachelor's degree in sociology and earned a master's degree in public administration from Texas State University. Outside of work, Megan loves to spend quality time with her 2 teenage boys and enjoys hiking, tennis, ballet, yoga, and The Ohio State Buckeyes. Go Bucks!

Special Thanks

We offer special thanks and gratitude to departing SASTF Members Investigator Kristina Gonzalez and Deepika Modali.

As a founding Task Force member, Inv. Gonzalez contributed her expertise as both an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Detective with the North Richland Hills Police Department and as a Criminal Investigator with the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office. Her contributions in the SASTF's original Law Enforcement Working Group focused on improving survivors' experience when interacting with law enforcement. We thank her for her service and wish her the best going forward.

Deepika Modali used her lived experience as a survivor and knowledge of adult Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) to ensure all survivors are considered in the Task Force's work and recommendations for improvement. Deepika's commitment to seeing survivors prioritized by the criminal justice system has truly enhanced Texas' response to sexual violence. We look forward to continuing to work with Deepika as a survivor leader and member of the SASTF's Survivor-Centered Working Group.

Survivor Voices

"I am a Survivor and Advocate"

Written by Leticia Manzano - Senior Manager of Sexual Violence Services and Survivor at the Houston Area Women's Center and member of the SASTF's Survivor-Centered Working Group

As the Senior Manager of Sexual Assault Services at the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC), I am eager to share what it means to truly support survivors of sexual violence. Given the high rates of assault, I recognize you may even be a survivor yourself. I am certain you know someone who is, even if they have never talked to you about it.

We are still living in a time when the victim is the one who often bears the shame of the assault, instead of the person who perpetrated the violence. My life's passion is to support survivor's healing processes and to shift accountability to the person who caused the harm.

When I started working at HAWC 26 years ago, I did not know the word survivor. I had been assaulted as a child by two different family members and then by a boyfriend in college. I had gotten some counseling as a teenager, and it was immensely helpful. But when I was raped in college, I made the choice that many survivors make, I tried to manage the effects like guilt and shame on my own. It was only through working at HAWC that I learned the trauma would be lasting and I learned many more coping skills to better help myself.

Others who have had sexual violence enacted against them identify as an overcomer or a thriver. I like those words too. But for me, I choose the word survivor. To engage in the continuous life-long healing process in the aftermath of something traumatic and painful and, at some point, shameful - that is what being a survivor means to me.

Like me, most of the survivors who come to HAWC were assaulted by someone they know. Many of these survivors still must regularly interact with their abuser and they live in fear the person could assault them again. The systems theoretically designed to hold

abusers accountable too often fail because they are designed with the misguided notion that rapes and assaults are typically committed by strangers. In fact, the opposite is true.

Eight out of ten assaults are committed by someone the person knows. Family members, romantic partners, friends, co-workers, religious leaders, coaches, neighbors - these are the people who commit assaults on the survivors we serve at HAWC. These are people they know and thought they could trust.

The systems also tend to underestimate the impact of the trauma and the way the brain responds during an assault. Far too many of my clients feel guilty about not fighting harder, not stopping the abuse when it was happening. One of the most important things survivors and the community need to know is: to protect ourselves in vulnerable and dangerous situations, humans often freeze. Abusers take advantage of that response.

Believe me when I tell you, freezing is not consenting.

During my tenure at HAWC, I have worked with children, teens, adults, men, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. I have a particular passion for working with immigrant survivors who may not speak English, whose legal status is perhaps in limbo, who are all too often preyed upon without any recourse, and whose culture has often not provided resources for their empowerment. As an immigrant myself, I can personally relate to their experience of helplessness and fear.

I have worked hard to liberate myself from belief systems that diminish my worth and compromise my full humanity. It is such a joyful process to invite those who have been crippled by shame into a new mindset where they can truly begin to see themselves as survivors. It is the greatest privilege of my life to accompany survivors on their journey to healing.

It is a journey that I have walked, so I know it is possible.

Possible? Yes! Achievable? Only if survivors can access the resources and support they need. That is why, in addition to working with individual survivors, I am very proud to serve on the Office of the Texas Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force. This statewide advocacy effort is critical to creating policies and conditions that enable survivors to heal and hold perpetrators accountable.

I am so grateful to HAWC for the opportunity to empower survivors and advocate on their behalf. And I deeply appreciate the wider community that supports survivors. The transformation we see in those we serve is made possible by you and your commitment to our movement to end sexual violence.

Community Efforts & Successes

SANE Simulation Training

By: Jenny Black, Director of Forensic Nursing at SAFE Alliance

SAFE Alliance's Sexual Assault Services team and Marika Alderink, with Trauma Informed Austin, shared a forensic medical exam simulation with the Task Force in July. The exam is part of a three-day intensive clinical simulation training for new forensic nurses and advocates. We started inviting community partners to this part of the training a few years ago to highlight survivors' experiences and to demonstrate forensic medical exam processes, decision points, and nuances in a learning environment that invites questions. We are very fortunate to work with specialized standardized patients who play the role of survivors and are also critical members of the instructional team, along with community-based advocates and expert forensic nurses.

Community partners have expressed gratitude for the window into forensic exams and this teaching methodology. We are developing similar simulation trainings for law enforcement and emergency medical services agencies. While roleplay practice is not new to these fields, the innovative approach of utilizing specialists, many of whom are also survivors, to roleplay realistic scenarios offers invaluable insights and support for responders who interact with survivors.

The clinical simulation training for forensic nurses and advocates delves into the neurobiology of trauma and how it affects survivors and those who provide care and services to them. Sustainability practices are also a key focus, as learners practice self-regulation strategies and identify indicators of burnout and vicarious trauma. Each learner has a three-person instructional team that creates a safe learning environment to practice the technical skills of evidence collection and the psychosocial skills that build rapport and responsiveness. Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting that the training is life changing. One nurse reflected during a debrief circle, "I don't feel that I need to go home and do self-care! This training was the most cup-filling experience I have had in a long, long time." We aim to improve not just technical skills but responders' ability to sustain themselves in this difficult work.



Task Force Members in the Field

2024 Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) Conference: Dive into the Multiverse

Task Force members, survivor leaders, and staff recently attended the 2024 TAASA Conference in South Padre Island. The conference theme, Dive into the Multiverse, allowed presenters to dive into how personal experiences impact the work, access to healing and justice, and create holistic support for survivors.

Statewide funders from the Office of the Governor (OOG), Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and the Health and Human Services Commission (HSCC) joined TAASA's CEO, Rose Luna, for the *Empowering Connections: Exploring Sexual Assault Support Funding Realities* session, where funding administrators were able to connect with those directly engaged in the frontline work of sexual assault support.



(left to right) Hillary England (OOG), Megan Bermea (HHSC), Rebecca Vieh (DPS)



(left to right) Donald Stout (OOG), Karly Watson (OAG), Megan Bermea (HHSC), Rose Luna (TAASA)

During the TAASA Award Ceremony, Task Force Member, Chief Jerry Meadors of Rockdale Police Department, received the Harold Cottle Justice Award, which recognizes someone who demonstrates outstanding support for victims and a willingness to educate self and colleagues within the criminal justice system about sexual assault. Survivor Leader and advocate, Leticia Manzano, received the Vivian Miles Lifetime Achievement Award which is awarded to someone who has demonstrated a lifetime commitment to ending sexual violence or to providing support to survivors. Congratulations to all the award recipients and thank you for all you do for survivors in Texas!

Vivian Miles Lifetime Achievement Award



Rose Luna and Leticia Manzano
(left to right)

Harold Cottle Justice Award



Rose Luna, Chief Jerry Meadors, Misty Biddick
(left to right)

Training Opportunities

SASTF October Webinar: *Fact or Expert: An Introduction to the Ethical Role and Use of Expert Witnesses*

Join Margaret Bassett, LPC-S, Director Applied Research & Innovative Instruction at the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (IDVSA) from the University of Texas at Austin for an informative training where participants will gain knowledge about who can be an expert witness and skills needed to professionally and ethically use or serve as an expert witness; benchmarks for establishing “expertise” before serving as or employing expert witnesses; and ethical, personal, and professional benefits of serving as, or utilizing, experts for case consultation and at trial.

Date: Thursday, October 17, 2024

Time: 11:30am – 1:00pm

[SASTF Webinar Registration](#)

Inaugural Crime Victims' Institute Conference: *Championing Advocacy, Policy, and Research for Victims and Survivors through a Broader Lens*

The main purpose of this conference is to provide a platform to examine, discuss, and educate individuals on best practices and emerging trends in the field with innovative information on current research to improve policy and advocacy targeting victims and survivors. The focal points of the conference are restorative justice, mass violence, and victimization-related policies and procedures. This conference is specifically designed for victim advocates, criminal justice professionals, medical and mental health providers, and others working directly with victims of crime. More information can be found in the [conference flyer](#).

Location: Sam Houston State University George J. Beto Criminal Justice Center – Huntsville, Texas

Dates: Wednesday, October 16, 2024 – Friday, October 18, 2024

**If selected as a conference attendee, you will be asked to complete a final registration form and pay a registration fee of \$250. This fee includes on-site lodging for two nights/three days, scheduled conference meals, and conference materials.*

[Conference Pre-Registration Form](#)

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) Training:

IPC is designed to make patrol officers aware of the variety of resources available to assist them in establishing the status of a child who may be missing, exploited, or at risk of exploitation and what courses of action are immediately available. IPC courses are open to law enforcement, first responders, prosecutors, child advocacy centers, victim services, other related NGOs, and fusion centers.

Dates and Location:

- October 7-8, 2024: Golden, CO
- October 21-22, 2024: Florence, TX
- October 21-22, 2024: New Mexico

[IPC Training Registration Link](#)

Save the Date: 2025 Crime Victim Services Division Conference

The Office of the Attorney General’s Crime Victim Services Division is hosting a multidisciplinary conference that will offer information, instruction, and networking opportunities focused on victim services and personal resilience. This conference is specifically designed for victim advocates, criminal justice professionals, medical and mental health providers, and others working directly with victims of crime.

Location: Austin, Texas

Dates: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 – Wednesday, January 22, 2025

Registration will open in mid-October 2024.

If you have any questions, please email the Conference Unit at

conferences@oag.texas.gov.
