Disability Policy Consortium
Call To Action: Urgent Need to Address Violence Against People With Disabilities and individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing

Violence against people with disabilities is high and there are too many gaps in services in Massachusetts

What does the research say?
In the US, according to the most recent statistics:

- It is estimated that adults with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of domestic and sexual abuse compared to adults with no disabilities.¹
- Approximately 50% of women who are deaf or hard of hearing in the US experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime.² Deaf and hard of hearing college students are 1.5 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence.³
- In Massachusetts, in 2011, around 27% of women and 14% of men with disabilities reported being sexually abused in their lifetime, compared to 13% of women and 4% of men with no disability.⁴
- People with disabilities are more likely to be abused by a family member, friend, or caregiver.⁵
- In 2004, 30% of people with disabilities reported such abuse.⁶
- In 2014 alone, the Massachusetts Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC), received 9,018 reports of abuse, up from 7,987 in 2013.⁷

The Challenge
Although there are many barriers to combatting violence against people with disabilities, some of the major obstacles include:

- Abuse cases are underreported.⁸
- CORI background checks don’t show abuse if a caregiver left a job before being investigated.⁹
- As of 2015, the DPPC is only able to investigate less than 2% of reported cases of abuse.¹⁰
- People with disabilities are not always educated about healthy relationships, domestic and sexual violence, their rights and available services.¹¹
- A caretaker who is the abuser can prevent abuse from being reported.¹²
- Caretakers who abuse people with disabilities may also inhibit the survivor’s ability to seek help since they know where the survivor lives. Further, the survivor may feel forced to keep their personal care attendant since they may not have an alternative caretaker.¹²
- There is a severe lack of research on the scope of violence against people with disabilities.¹³
- There is a vital need for more accessible services and shelters for survivors with disabilities.¹²
- There is a lack of interpreters at shelters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.¹⁴

Next Steps for Advocates

“Everyone can play a role in preventing sexual violence against people with disabilities because I think it is connected to “ableism” in our society in general and combating “ableism” and discrimination is part of combating sexual violence.” – Shelley Yen Ewert, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center

¹ DPPC is an independent agency committed to investigating cases of abuse and developing strategies to prevent further incidents of abuse.
To help people with disabilities who are victims of violence in Massachusetts, the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) recommends that advocates:

- Develop relationships between disability organizations, and agencies that provide services to domestic and sexual abuse survivors to increase understanding of the services available and of the unique needs of people with disabilities experiencing abuse.  
- Make combating violence against people with disabilities a major advocacy item to promote.  
- Ensure people with disabilities are provided with sexual education as well as about abuse and services available to them if they are being abused.  
- Attend an Awareness and Action training on Recognizing, Reporting and Responding to Abuse of Persons with Disabilities (Call 617-727-6465 x234 for more information.)  
- Support an increase in line item 1107-2501 to $4,030,099 to allow the DPPC to hire 12 new employees to bring its staff up to 44 people to conduct investigations.  
- Encourage the Department of Developmental Services to continue to fund and possibly increase funding for IMPACT: Ability so more individuals can benefit from the program.  
- Encourage more people with disabilities to participate in IMPACT Boston’s self-defense trainings.  
- Include information about domestic and sexual abuse in communications from your organization to elected officials.  
- Raise awareness about care workers who are under investigation for abuse in one institution but may be seeking work in other institutions.  
- Hold forums with your members to increase awareness of spotting and addressing domestic and sexual abuse against people with disabilities.

Take action now! Help end violence against people with disabilities.

The DPC is a statewide cross-disability civil rights organization. Visit us online: www.dpcma.org.

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16Alterio N. (2016) Personal Communication with Maggie Sheets. 2/18/16.  