VIOLENCE FREE IOWA

Domestic Violence Homicide Report

Fiscal Year 2025
(Oct. 1, 2024 — Sept. 30, 2025)



VIOLENCE FREE IOWA

The Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence

Violence Free Iowa leads and supports a statewide coalition of 24 victim service provider organizations advancing sexual assault and domestic violence prevention efforts, crisis intervention, and long-term stability to ensure every Iowan has the opportunity to feel safe, heal, and thrive.

FY2025 Domestic Violence Homicide Report

While this report focuses on domestic violence homicides, it is critical to note that homicide is the most visible — and most extreme — outcome of a much broader pattern of harm. For every life lost, there are countless survivors living with ongoing threats, coercion, and fear.

Domestic violence is a pervasive and urgent public health and safety issue. The absence of fatalities does not indicate the absence of harm.

Feeling physically, mentally, and emotionally safe is a basic human right. When even one person experiences violence, it affects the collective health of the entire community.

Domestic violence is often characterized by controlling behaviors like:

- Threatening to harm partners, children, pets, or family.
- Intimidating survivors into silence by warning of retaliation, such as exposing personal information.
- Weaponizing consequences related to employment, immigration status, social networks, pregnancy, or sexual orientation.

These dynamics create an environment of constant danger and strategizing for survival, even when signs of abuse are not immediately visible.

Violence Free Iowa works alongside victim service providers to lead a statewide movement addressing sexual and domestic violence through community and system transformation, training, and public policy change.

Our vision is for every community to thrive free from violence — and realizing this vision requires all of us to work together.

Terminology

Domestic Violence (DV)

In this report, *domestic violence (DV)* is an umbrella term to describe all forms of violence that occur within intimate and familial relationships. DV differs from random or stranger violence because it is rooted in interpersonal dynamics, power, and control.

This category includes cases where the death of children, parents, siblings, or other relatives are directly related to intimate partner violence (IPV) or generational patterns of abuse within the family system.

For example, a child killed during an IPV incident or a parent who becomes a casualty of their child's abusive relationship are considered victims of domestic violence.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

In this report, *intimate partner violence (IPV)* refers specifically to violence between current or former romantic partners, including teen dating violence. IPV can include physical, emotional, sexual, or economic abuse, and it is the most common context for the homicides documented in this report.

Data Collection Methods

The data in this report came from the Iowa Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) database, statewide media coverage, case information submitted by community partners, and reports from our coalition members (victim service provider organizations).

While incorporating multiple sources improves accuracy and depth, there are limitations. Information about homicides:

- Is often incomplete.
- Changes as investigations progress.
- May never be publicly disclosed.

Furthermore, many DV incidents are not reported prior to a homicide, and victims' experiences may not be fully known by family, friends, victim advocates, or first responders.

Therefore, this report should not be interpreted as a comprehensive account of DV-related fatalities in Iowa. Instead, **it is a data-informed analysis of identified cases to better understand patterns, trends, risk factors, and opportunities to improve prevention, intervention, and system responses.**

28 victims of domestic violence homicide in FY2025

6 victims of murder-suicide
(5 aggressors' suicides not included in total of 28 victims)





2 victims killed in the same case
(double homicide, followed by aggressor's suicide)



1 ruled self-defense
(as of Sept. 2026)



24 of the victims were killed in their homes

357 victims reported by the Attorney General's Fatality Chronicle, 1995-2021

+

88 victims reported by Violence Free Iowa, FY2021 - FY2024

+

28 victims reported by Violence Free Iowa, FY2025

=

AT LEAST

473

lives have been lost to domestic violence since January 1, 1995.

Gender and DV Homicides

Although domestic violence affects people of all genders, women disproportionately experience its most extreme forms, including severe physical violence, firearm violence, and intimate partner homicide or murder-suicide. These forms of violence are most commonly perpetrated by men. All 13 female victims identified in this report were killed by men they knew — a husband, father, boyfriend, former partner, daughter's boyfriend, or brother.

Perpetrator gender is also important when examining violence against male victims. This report includes 15 male victims. Seven were killed by men they knew, including a father, mother's boyfriend, brother, grandfather, and a man formerly involved with someone in their close circle. One was killed by a law enforcement officer during a domestic violence call. The other seven were killed by women.

Four of those seven were killed by women with whom they had been romantically involved. In these cases, the women reported experiencing DV in the relationship and described their actions as self-defense, with accounts of prior abuse also provided by family or friends. A fifth was killed by a female cousin who also reported self-defense.

We count the male victim who was fatally shot by law enforcement because his death occurred within the context of a DV incident. Law enforcement responded after his girlfriend called for help. Upon arrival, officers found the man intoxicated, armed with a loaded gun, and threatening his girlfriend, her child, and them.

Understanding gender in DV is important for prevention. Educating boys and young men about healthy relationships, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and harmful gender norms is a key component of preventing teen dating violence, intimate partner violence, and family violence before patterns of harm become established.

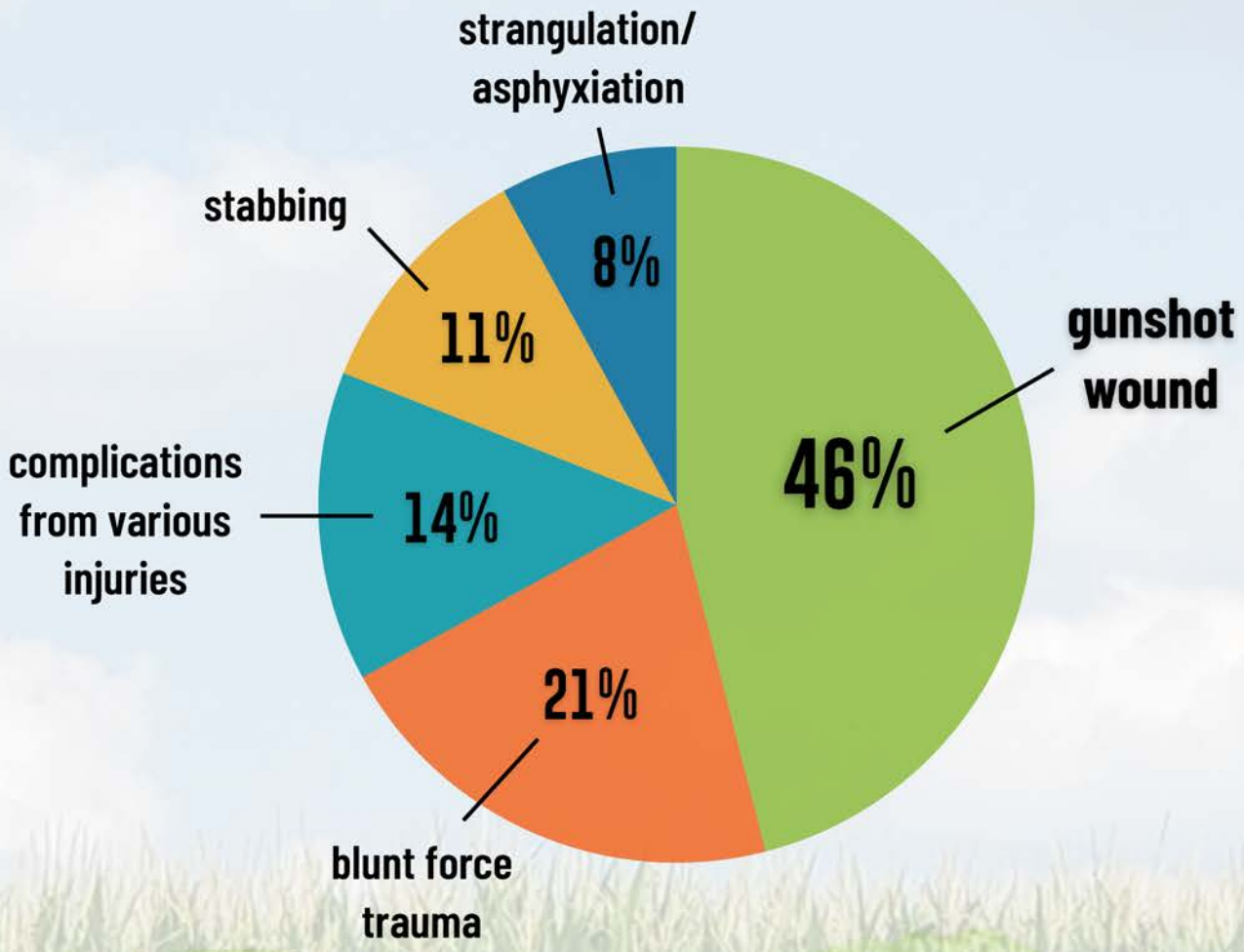
ALL 13 FEMALE VICTIMS

identified in this report were killed by men they knew

4 MALE VICTIMS

were killed by women they had been romantically involved with and reportedly abused

Manner of Death



ALL 6 VICTIMS

of murder-suicide in FY2025 were killed by gun at the hands of a male aggressor.

National gun death statistics:

- DV assaults involving a gun are 12 times more likely to result in death than those involving other weapons or bodily force.
- The presence of a gun in a DV situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%.

Sources: Giffords Law Center; Everytown

Child Victims and Survivors

AT LEAST
1 VICTIM
was known to be pregnant at the time of her homicide, resulting in the loss of both the mother and her unborn child.

Pregnancy can be one of the most dangerous times for a woman experiencing abuse.

6 VICTIMS
WERE UNDER THE AGE OF 18

All of them were younger than 5 years old.

AT LEAST
23 CHILDREN
lost a parent to domestic violence homicide in FY2025.

8
OF THOSE CHILDREN
lost both of their parents in murder-suicide events.

Prior Histories and Restraining Orders

IN 9 OF 28 CASES the victim or their family or friends disclosed a history of domestic violence by the perpetrator.

IN 4 CASES the victim had a protective order in place at the time of the homicide, which was violated by their abuser.



Criminalized Survival in the U.S.

Criminalized survival happens when victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, or extreme poverty are arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated for actions taken to protect themselves or stay alive.

MEN

who kill female partners receive an average prison sentence of

2 TO 6 YEARS

WOMEN

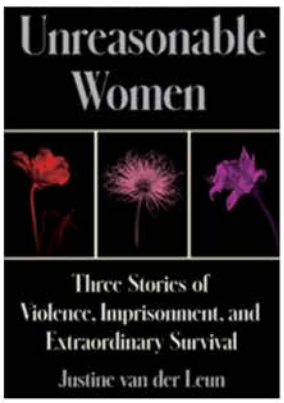
who kill male partners — often in self-defense — receive an average prison sentence of

15 YEARS

UP TO 90% OF WOMEN

imprisoned for killing a male partner report previous abuse by that man

RECOMMENDED READING ON CRIMINALIZED SURVIVAL



Sources: ACLU, Women in Prison; UNC School of Law

One Iowa Survivor's Story

In June of 2025, Kimberly Charlton of Cedar Falls was arrested for killing her husband after he attempted to assault her in their home.

Kimberly stated that her dog came to her defense, becoming a target for her husband's violence. She shot her husband to protect herself and her dog.

The deceased victim's family testified in support of Kimberly, saying she was no danger to society and not a violent person but that she had, in fact, been abused for most of her 45-year marriage.

Despite these facts, Kimberly was charged with first-degree murder, a class A felony. A conviction in Iowa comes with an automatic life sentence.

MORE INFO ON CRIMINALIZED SURVIVAL



Why Safe and Accessible Housing Matters

Housing access and early lease termination allow survivors to escape violence without facing eviction, financial burdens, homelessness, or potential death.

Safe and accessible housing provides the physical safety survivors need to:

- Care for their children.
- Work toward health, professional, educational, legal, and social goals.
- Begin the healing process.

86% of all DV homicides in FY2025 occurred in the victims' homes.

MORE INFO ON THE SAFE HOUSING MODEL

Violence Free Iowa continues to push for public policies that remove barriers to safe emergency housing, as this is the #1 barrier to safety and self-determination for survivors and the most-requested service within our network of 24 victim services providers.

Support our public policy efforts:

- Early Lease Termination Bill
- Eviction Expungement/Sealing Bill

This will remain a priority for the 2027 legislative session. Sign up for our newsletter to learn more about our public policy efforts, or contact Laura Hessburg at laurah@violencefreeiowa.org with questions.

Beyond the Numbers

The Iowa Victim Service Call Center received

44,680 CONTACTS

from survivors seeking support and resources
from January 1 – December 31, 2025.

The data in this report reflects only a portion of the lived reality of domestic violence in Iowa.

Many survivors do not engage with law enforcement or victim service systems for various reasons. This means that DV-related calls to law enforcement – while significant – only represent a fraction of the prevalence of abuse.

Similarly, homicide data captures only the cases where violence resulted in death, leaving the full scope of coercion, intimidation, and non-fatal violence unmeasured.

These gaps underscore the importance of interpreting homicide data with care. While fatality reviews and criminal justice responses are essential, they are only part of a comprehensive approach to addressing domestic violence.

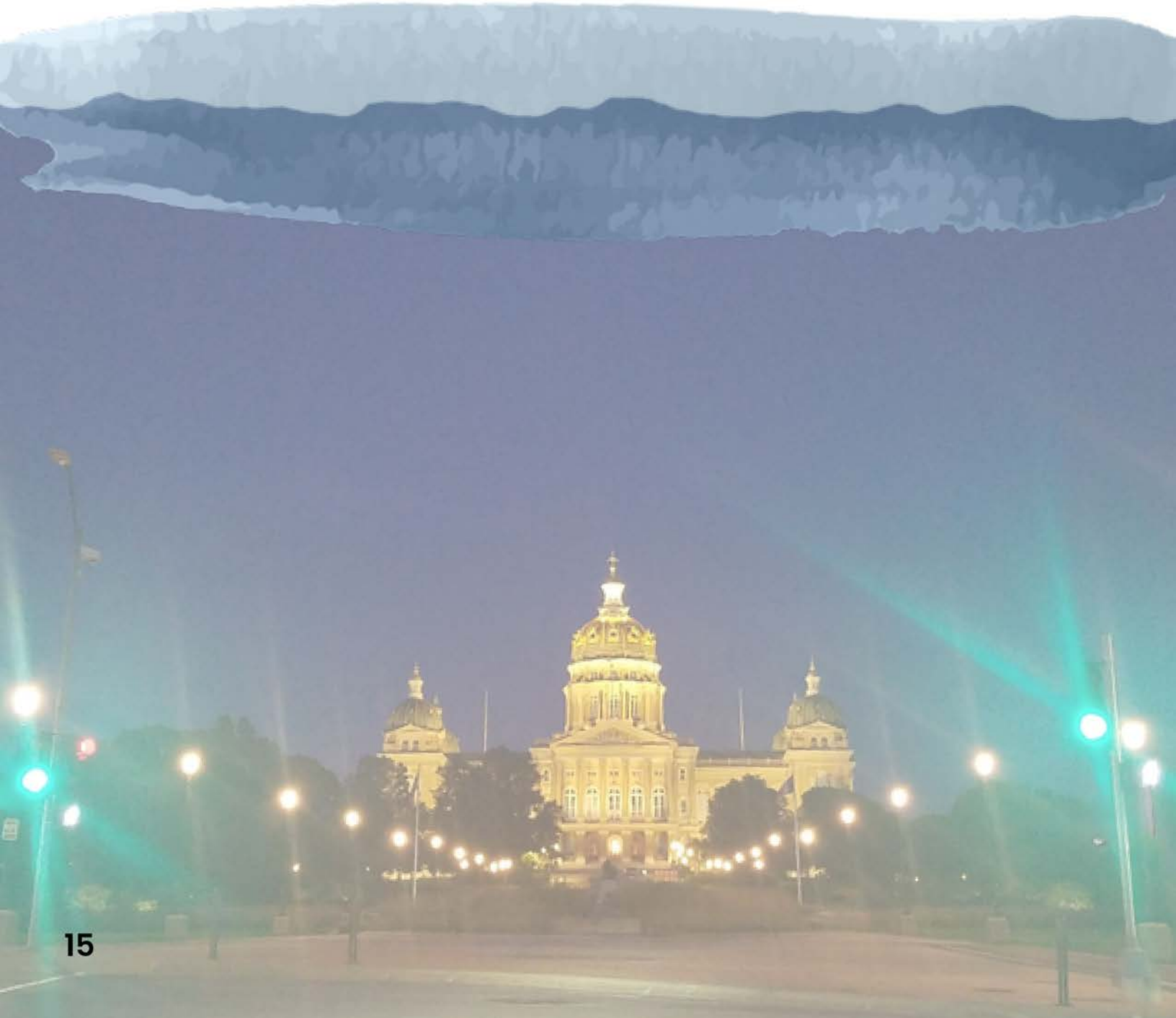
Survivors need access to a full continuum of options, including confidential advocacy, housing, healthcare, economic support, and community-based services – whether or not they choose to engage with the criminal legal system.

Source: Iowa Department of Justice Victim Assistance Section Annual Grants Report, FY2025

A Comprehensive Response Includes Prevention

Research consistently shows that individuals and families experience greater safety and stability when their basic needs are met.

Identifying barriers, disparities, and the ways they intersect with violence is critical for developing more effective, prevention-oriented strategies.



Public health indicators that intersect with domestic violence:

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Access to healthcare
- Housing stability
- Economic security

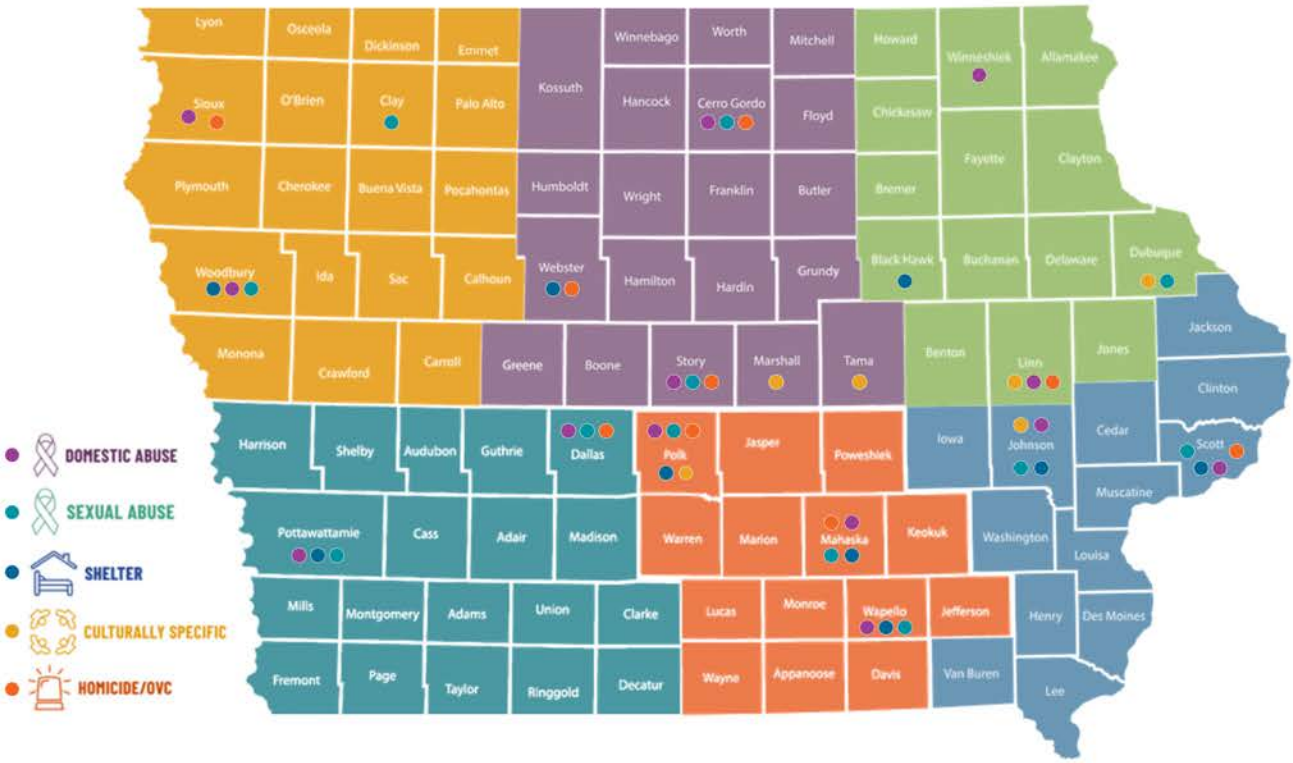
The findings in this report reinforce the need for a more comprehensive, survivor-centered approach to violence response and prevention in Iowa.

While criminal justice responses are critical in cases of lethal violence, they cannot be the sole focus of investment or public policy. We must also prioritize prevention education, early intervention, and sustained support for survivors beyond moments of crisis.

Effective prevention relies on strong partnerships, robust data systems, and well-funded community-based services (including culturally specific programs). We must ensure that all survivors — regardless of whether they engage with formal systems — have access to safety, healing, and long-term stability.

Domestic violence is not inevitable — it is preventable.

Iowa Victim Service Support Network



Region 1

- CAASA
- Family Crisis Centers, Inc.
- SafePlace

Region 2

- ACCESS
- Crisis Intervention Service
- DSAOC

Region 3

- Friends of the Family
- Helping Services
- Riverview Center
- Waypoint

Region 4

- Catholic Charities DV & SA Program
- Crisis Intervention & Advocacy Center

Region 5

- Children & Families of Iowa
- Crisis Intervention Services
- Family Crisis Center
- Polk Co. Crisis & Advocacy Center

Region 6

- DVIP/RVAP
- Family Resources

Statewide Services

Culturally Specific Programs

- EMBARC
- L.U.N.A.
- Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity
- NISAA African Family Services
- R.I.S.E.
- Thrive Together Today

Iowa Victim Service Call Center

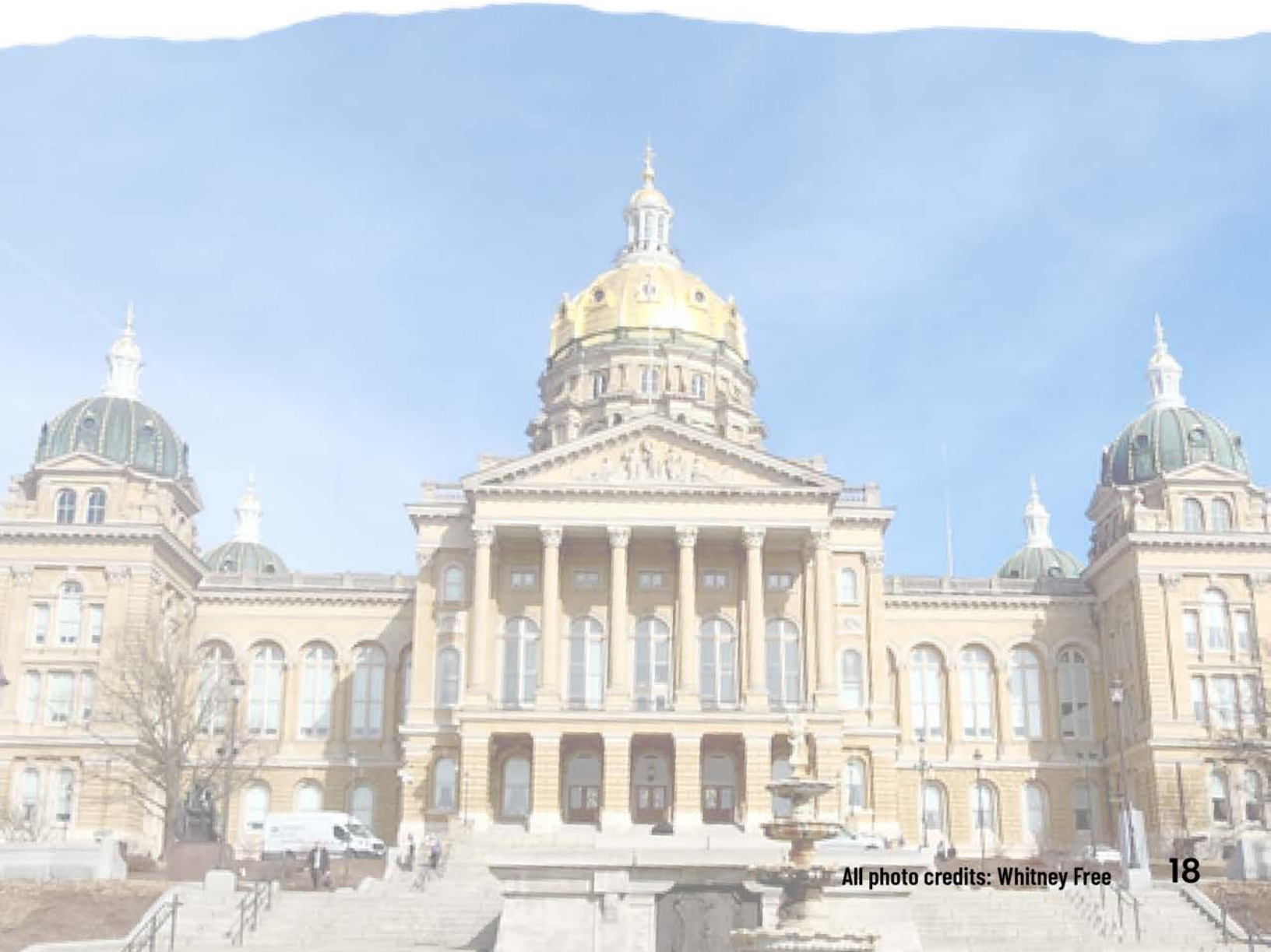
- Toll Free: 1-800-770-1650
- Text: "iowahelp" to 20121

Credits

This report was developed by Dr. Ruxandra Marcu, with data compilation support from Bleu Fricas-Valladares.

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The Coalition Against
Sexual and Domestic Violence
A safer, stronger Iowa is possible.
www.ViolenceFreeIowa.org
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