

**Morning Plenary Remarks**  
**September 15, 2016**

Good Morning! My name is Patricia Teffenhart and I am the Executive Director of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault and on behalf of NJCASA and our sister-coalition and co-hosts of today's event, the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence, I welcome you to New Jersey's first ever dual domestic and sexual violence conference!

We're honored to have so many friends, colleagues, and allies join us today. 300 professionals, volunteers, and advocates all dedicated to a Safer Garden State – give yourselves a round of applause!!!!

Today, you'll have an opportunity to attend workshops and discussions on a wide variety of issues relating to sexual and domestic violence. Prevention. Healthcare response. Prosecution. Social media. Serving marginalized communities.

These conversations, enriched by the diverse perspectives you all bring to the room, should provide plenty of opportunity for us to learn, grow, and challenge ourselves to ask the ultimate question that guides OUR work at NJCASA, "For what purpose?"

We ask ourselves this question regularly, "For what purpose?"

When using that question through which to funnel our decisions and our actions, we push ourselves to challenge the status quo and to think, intentionally and strategically, about how the work we're doing can impact communities and best serve survivors.



Let's start with a really poignant question. For what purpose do we, as a coalition, even exist? Ahhh! A big question!

But, in today's saturated non-profit sector, I think it's an important, albeit terrifying, question to ask. Resources are limited. Competition is fierce. Why NJCASA?

Well... about 35 years ago, NJCASA was birthed by our foremothers working to serve survivors at the local level. Women who launched, maybe even unintentionally at first, community based organizations from their living rooms in response to the needs of those impacted by violence. Many of those organizations are represented here today and we thank you for continuing to work in our local communities, serving some of our most vulnerable citizens 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Thank you.

But...what our foremothers knew is that there is power in numbers. There was a need for a central, unified voice to amplify the work being done locally, to take the survivors' stories and use them to influence policy, to garner public attention, to advocate for resources.

And so...NJCASA...and *similarly* NJCEDV were born.

But... that is our history. What is our future? Are we fulfilling our mission? Are we working to elevate the voice of survivors? Are we engaging in the challenging, yet necessary, conversations critical to creating sustainable change?

For what purpose?

As coalition staff we have a unique role to play. We must expertly and swiftly transition our understanding and perspective between



the micro and macro levels of society. We need to advocate for survivors across all systems and for that reason we are so happy to be with all of you today.

For what purpose?

To defy the confines of professional associations and geographically convenient partnerships. To push beyond, “because this is what the funders want” or “this is how we’ve always done it”. To look as critically at our own approaches and responses as we do those of other systems. To bridge the gaps. To appreciate our differences. To embrace the power of transparency. To re-energize our commitment to our missions.

To create a Safer Garden State.

Two years ago, NJCASA asked, “For what purpose do we collect sexual assault forensic evidence?” To identify perpetrators. To hold them accountable. To give survivors an opportunity to pursue justice. To create safer communities. For that purpose, we worked with the Attorney General’s Office in 2014 to expand the evidence retention guidelines from a 90-day minimum to a 5-year minimum.

But that is not enough. For what purpose does retaining evidence have, if not to be used in the prosecution of offenders?

For that purpose, we were pleased when the Division on Women supported NJCASA’s revamping of the training manual for Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates in 2015. As part of the first line response, our advocates play a critical role in supporting survivors through some of their most traumatic moments. For what purpose do advocates serve if not to help survivors understand and navigate a complex and intimidating path to



justice and wellness? To help survivors access services they've maybe never considered...never needed...never noticed. For what purpose do we train advocates if not to equip them with the latest policies, best practices, and statistics to inform their work? How can their response help ensure our efforts to retain evidence longer can be put to good use?

Similarly, we were thrilled when, in 2016, the Division of Criminal Justice asked us to facilitate a portion of a symposium dedicated to providing law enforcement professionals with the most up-to-date practices in relation to serving survivors of sexual and domestic violence, and child abuse. To, *in our own words*, describe the role of the advocate. To provide an overview of the intense 40-hour training they complete. To highlight the resource they can be to a SART activation. To help other SART members understand *for what purpose* to work with advocates in our shared desire to best serve survivors.

The bottom line is that none of us got into this line of work to serve ourselves. Rather, we are a room full of brilliant, highly-skilled, well-intentioned professionals that have dedicated our lives to serving others.

Our current political and social discourse would lead us to believe that we are more different than we are alike. But this is not true. In this room, we are surrounded by close to 300 people dedicated to a Safer Garden State. We are advocates. Counselors. Prosecutors. Healthcare and law enforcement professionals. We are non-profit executives. Fundraisers. Preventionists.

We want the same thing. We want the children we love to grow up in a safer, less violent society. We want those we love to be supported and respected, should they ever need to access the many services provided by the professionals in this room.

I believe we all want Brock Turner to serve more than 30 days in jail. We want him to be banned from opportunities to speak on college campuses spilling his poison and perpetuating the victim-blaming narrative that allows young, white, privileged men like him to drown out the authentic voice of survivors.

We want justice.

But... working towards a more just society requires that we commit to sifting through the thick, overwhelming weight of oppression. In order to live in a more just society, we need to let go of our egos, recognize our privilege, and acknowledge that there is no ONE reality in this country. That our realities are shaped by our sex, our gender identity, our sexuality, our zip code, our race, our ethnicity, our religion, our marital status, etc. etc. etc.

And that with so many different realities, it's impossible to create a "one size fits all" approach to our work. To remind ourselves that, it's okay to disagree. That we are all here to serve. That there is value in the discourse.

When we ask ourselves, "For what purpose?" we compel ourselves to do more and do better. To be worthy of the survivors with whom we work. Because, for most of us in this room, the answer to the question, "For what purpose?" is "Because survivors deserve it." Or "Because it's necessary to create a safer, more just society".

Embarking upon a year-long process of creating and adopting coalition membership standards. The purpose? To support programs in their efforts to provide the highest-quality services possible. To move towards a level of programmatic equity



throughout the state, so that we can all refer survivors to services in ANY county with reasonable confidence that those services are congruent with the top-notch services provided somewhere else.

Waiting in the State House for EIGHT HOURS, for the opportunity to testify in support of sexual assault protective order legislation. Because passing that legislation into law provided expanded opportunities for survivors to be protected...to feel safe....to heal.

Advocating to the legislature, and the Governor's Office for a 72% increase in funding to support the critical work being done by our county-based sexual violence service organizations. Because for too long sexual violence services have been strung together with pennies, impacting our ability to hire and retain talented professionals. Because for too long survivors in some counties were added to waiting lists for critical crisis counseling. Because this work is meaningful and important and it costs money to run a 24-hour/day service organization.

Engaging in meaningful conversations with funders and other stakeholders about data. For what purpose do we collect this data? What story does our data tell? Can we show our impact? Are we using it to inform our practices, both in executing contracts and providing services? If not, why not? What can we do differently?

Standing firm in our positions regarding sexual violence prevention. One-time sessions are *not* prevention. We cannot end sexual violence with 30-minute high school auditorium sessions once a marking period or first year orientation.

For what purpose?

When we ask ourselves, “For what purpose?”, we remind ourselves of the reasons why our roles are so important.

Honestly? I get it. This work is hard. There is no easy one-step process to achieve meaningful change. Each small accomplishment must, and should, be celebrated. But... we must also have the fortitude to push further, think bigger, take the next step. Go big or go home! Swing for the fences! Survivors depend on us. Our communities depend on us. We cannot stop.

And...

We cannot do this alone. Every person in this room and every system within which you work... you are critical allies of ours. We are in this together.

It's *for that purpose* we have organized today's conference.

When I started at the coalition three years ago, Jane and I discussed the need for an opportunity to gather all of us in the same space...talking about the intersections of violence and oppression and the unique and important roles we all have in dismantling the socio-cultural norms that allow sexual and domestic violence to infiltrate our society. Today, that vision has come to life.

I want to thank the NJCASA Board of Trustees. If you're on our board, can you please stand? Thank you for supporting our vision, participating in its execution, and being steady, compassionate leaders.

I want to thank the Division on Women for allowing us to structure some of our grant funds to expand opportunities for individuals working at our local programs to attend today's conference.

I want to thank the Division of Criminal Justice for its continued support of NJCASA's training and outreach initiatives.

I want to thank the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for providing the foundational funding that made today's conference possible.

I need to also highlight the amazing team of brilliant professionals with whom I get to work at NJCASA on a daily basis. Jyoti, Liz, Rob, Sarah, and Marissa – please stand. This is it folks! We are a mighty staff of SIX! And each person on our team rolled up their sleeves to dedicate their professional expertise to support today's program. I am so lucky to work with this team – everyone please give them a round of applause.

And I want to thank the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence for taking this journey with us. We are distinctly unique organizations with our own priorities and approaches. But, we are also undeniably connected. Not just because half of NJCASA's members are also NJCEDV members, but because both coalitions believe that change is possible. That collaboration is key. They we have to break down the silos and build strategic partnerships. Because we both believe that we can contribute to “A Safer Garden State”.





With that, I am going to turn the microphone over to my dear friend and colleague, Jane Shivas, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence.