

April 5, 2021

Gail Johnson  
City Commissioner  
City of Gainesville



Gainesville, FL 32627

Dear Commissioner Johnson,

We, a group of students at the University of Florida, are writing to you regarding the domestic violence problem in Florida. Currently, [Florida has the third-highest estimated number of domestic violence victims](#) in the U.S., and COVID-19 has only exacerbated this issue. Stay-at-home orders, which were intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19, left many domestic violence victims helpless at home with their abusers.

Peaceful Paths is a domestic abuse network in Gainesville. Peaceful Paths offers many services and has proved helpful for many survivors of domestic abuse both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In [2020, the agency helped over 1,000 survivors in which 96 survivors were permanently housed and 603 legal clients were served](#). Peaceful Paths, according to its executive director Theresa Beachy, [has received 25% more domestic violence calls and requests for legal assistance during the outbreak](#). Ending domestic violence needs to be a collective community so that continuous assistance can be readily available for those impacted by domestic violence.

One of the members of this group, Danielle Sohn, is currently a volunteer at Peaceful Paths. Speaking from personal experience, she has seen the positive impact Peaceful Paths makes for victims of domestic violence. The agency offers a space for courageous individuals and brave families in Gainesville to feel safe and cared for. The work being done at Peaceful Paths to heal its community is incomparable.

Given the increase in domestic violence cases due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are urging you to increase the local funding of Peaceful Paths annually from \$293,222 to \$370,000. This increase in funding will help to keep the agency's crucial services running, such as their emergency shelter, their violence prevention programs, a 24-hour helpline, crisis counseling, and even an economic empowerment education program. We believe that it is important for the local government to show its support for the agency and show its stance against domestic violence through providing funding for critical support and legal help. This money will increase the amount of services Peaceful Paths will be able to provide to victims, thus strengthening our community. We hope you see this increase in money as important as we do.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Sohn, Evan Combs, Anja Rmus, Cassandra Huffman  
Students of the University of Florida