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## **Family Violence Law Center and Oakland City Auditor, Courtney Ruby Collaborate to Create Deeper Impact for Women Experiencing Homelessness**

OAKLAND, California (October 13, 2021): In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Family Violence Law Center (FVLC) and Oakland’s City Auditor, Courtney Ruby announce their collaboration to expand the public discourse on homelessness. This collaboration comes at a time of increased pressure from the Oakland community to prioritize the City’s homelessness crisis. To advocates on the ground, the City’s struggle to “solve” homelessness stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of who is homeless and what people experiencing homelessness need to be safe and successfully housed. This partnership between FVLC and the Oakland City Auditor’s Office may be the first step in correcting a systemic issue.

In April 2021, Auditor Ruby released a Performance Audit of the City of Oakland’s Homeless Encampment Management Intervention and Activities. While the audit was thorough, it did not specifically address the unique challenges in quantifying the extent of homelessness among women, and highlight the issues facing unhoused women. The FVLC Policy Department responded to this audit detailing its gaps and appealing to the City Auditor to integrate gender considerations and the unequal impacts of homelessness on women into future assessments of housing and homelessness in Oakland. Since then, the FVLC Policy Department, Auditor Ruby and her team have been eagerly working together to produce a more comprehensive audit that will assess the City’s performance in serving all residents including women, transgender, gender nonconforming, and intersex (TGI) people.

Auditor Ruby noted, “I’m deeply grateful the FVLC took the time to reach out and educate my team and me on how the City Auditor’s Office could improve our work regarding homelessness and housing by presenting issues of particular concern to women. In a recent meeting with FVLC, they explained the repercussions of gender issues not being addressed or called out when discussing our unhoused population. FVLC made it clear that a lack of consideration of gender in the development and implementation of policies around homelessness and related

interventions, exacerbates inequities and diminishes the likelihood that women experiencing homelessness will be adequately served.”

“At FVLC, one of our goals with Domestic Violence Awareness Month is to have meaningful conversations with community members about domestic violence issues,” says Nishara Gunasekara, Housing and Gender Justice Advocate at Family Violence Law Center. “Oftentimes, domestic violence is couched away as a “private” issue, which perpetuates silence and stigma. We are grateful for Auditor Ruby’s and her team’s willingness to not only engage around this topic, but help us highlight what has been ignored for so long.”

“Domestic violence is the biggest driver of women’s homelessness,” says Tunisia Owens, Policy and Advocacy Manager at Family Violence Law Center. “Once unhoused, women are at even greater risk of sexual assault and domestic violence. As a result, women will double-up on beds, couch surf, and sleep in cars, essentially exhausting all other means before resorting to street homelessness. This means that women’s homelessness is often less visible to the public because safety is a such a huge concern. Nevertheless, women and TGI folks make up over a third of Alameda County’s homeless

population, and for many reasons, we strongly believe even this is an undercount. Expanding our knowledge of who is homeless and what their needs are is the first step in addressing and caring for our homeless populations. We believe our collaboration with the Oakland City Auditor’s Office can serve a critical role in this work.”

The Office of the City Auditor is currently conducting its second audit of homelessness in Oakland. This audit will identify disparities in service and outcomes among the various populations that make up Oakland’s unhoused population, assess the coordination, partnership and performance of city departments, other governmental agencies, and contractors, in addition to analyzing program retention rates.

Auditor Ruby stated, “Our audits work to unearth systemic issues and guide the City in addressing the needs of all our residents. Our collaboration with FVLC is a reminder about the importance of getting feedback from the public on our audits that directly impact our residents. As one of four women serving as a Citywide elected official in Oakland, I have a duty to ensure we are doing all we can to raise awareness on domestic violence and other issues affecting women and keeping survivors safe and served.”

“We hope this partnership between FVLC and the Oakland City Auditor’s Office inspires gender-based violence advocates across the Bay Area and California to reach out to their City Auditor to see what can be done on expanding the dialogue on homelessness,” says Tunisia Owens. “In this work, allies are our biggest strength and we are glad to have welcomed Auditor Ruby and her team into this space.”

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**ABOUT OAKLAND CITY AUDITOR COURTNEY RUBY**

City Auditor Courtney A. Ruby, CPA, CFE, was re-elected in November 2018, and took office in January 2019. She previously served as Oakland's City Auditor for eight years, between 2007 and 2014. In 2014, Courtney was recognized by the American Center for Government Auditing as one of the most influential professionals in Government Auditing. In April 2019, an Association of Local Government Auditors peer review team found the Office of the City Auditor met the highest standards in performance auditing.

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