

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 17, 2025

GARDNER RECEIVES GRANT TO MAKE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCATE FULL TIME POSITION

Video Grant Announcement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKMKZBVLhCM>

GARDNER, MA – The City of Gardner has been awarded a \$20,000 Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Administration Grant (JAG) to expand the City's Domestic Violence Advocate position from part-time to full-time within the Gardner Police Department.

The Domestic Violence Advocate position was created by the City in 2023 through funding from the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which initially supported the role on a part-time basis. Since its inception, the position has played a critical role in connecting survivors of domestic violence with resources, support services, and assistance navigating the criminal justice system.

By making the position full-time, the City will be able to enhance the level of support and outreach available to residents experiencing domestic violence, ensuring greater availability and responsiveness for those in need.

"Expanding this role to a full-time position is a major step forward in strengthening the support network we have built in Gardner for victims and survivors of domestic violence," said Mayor Michael J. Nicholson. "This position has already made an incredible impact in connecting individuals with the help they need. By making it full-time, we're reaffirming our commitment to ensuring that no one in our community faces these challenges alone."

The new funding reflects the City's ongoing efforts to expand access to critical public safety and social service resources while building upon the success of prior grant initiatives.

"Investing in programs that directly help people in moments of crisis is what makes local government work best," said State Representative Jon Zlotnik (D-Gardner). "This expansion is a testament to the City's proactive approach in addressing domestic violence and supporting survivors, and I'm proud to see Gardner continue to lead the way on this front."

"As someone who grew up in this City and has lived through instances of domestic violence, I am proud to see the City making this move to provide residents with resources that weren't available to me and that can keep them safe," said Ward 2 City Councilor Dana Heath. "I'm proud to call Gardner my home and proud to be a part of a community that doesn't shy away from the tough issues but tackles them head on to make sure people have what they need to be safe and healthy in their lives."

“This funding will enable the Gardner Police Department to enhance and grow our domestic violence outreach to ensure victims in this community receive the care and support they deserve,” said Gardner Police Chief Eric McAvene. “We are thankful for the support from our local and state partners to fund such necessary outreach.”

“The Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force is beyond thrilled that the Police Department's Domestic Violence Civilian Advocate will now be able to provide support full-time,” said Elizabeth Rhodes, Chair of the Gardner Domestic Violence Council. “This is a meaningful investment in survivor services and reflects the City’s commitment to strengthening its response to domestic violence.”

This initiative builds on Gardner’s broader efforts to strengthen its public safety and social service framework. Over the past several years, the City has expanded partnerships between law enforcement, social workers, and public health professionals to better address issues such as domestic violence, mental health crises, and substance use. The expansion of the Domestic Violence Advocate position complements these ongoing efforts by ensuring that survivors receive not only legal and protective support, but also access to the wraparound services they need to rebuild their lives.

“This expansion is not just about staffing—it’s about making sure that when someone reaches out for help, someone is always there to answer,” Mayor Nicholson added. “This funding helps us continue to build a safer, stronger, and more supportive community for everyone who calls Gardner home.”

###