



**For Immediate Release**

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### **Thousands of Handbags to be Donated to Texan Survivors at Shelters and Healthcare Access Points**

A handbag represents something deeply private to its owner – a kind of survival kit for life in a modern world. For those experiencing power-based abuse, it may also serve as a life-saving utility.

Texas Advocacy Project (TAP) – with support from Travis County Sheriff's Office – is launching its 2021 Handbags for Hope campaign now through April 9<sup>th</sup>, providing solutions to lead those experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault to safety and free legal services. They need donations of new handbags and diaper bags from the community to have another successful year. For a list of donation sites or to plan your own drive visit [www.TexasAdvocacyProject.org/handbags-hope](http://www.TexasAdvocacyProject.org/handbags-hope).

More than 45,500 handbags have been distributed to survivors across Texas since the campaign launched 14 years ago. Each bag is fitted with the following:

- A discreet tag that lists TAP's toll-free legal line 800-374-HOPE
- Safety planning information
- Allstate Foundation's Financial Empowerment Planning Guide

These bags were distributed to hospitals for the first time in 2019, making them available to survivors of rape. After a survivor goes through a rape exam they often have to leave behind clothing and belongings, an extremely dehumanizing experience. Leaving the hospital with your belongings in a new bag versus a plastic bag, not only gives some dignity back, it also gives hope through the agency's free services.

This year, in addition to the hospital and sexual assault services expansion, TAP will be amplifying their outreach to new parents and caregivers by collecting and processing brand new diaper bags. These diaper bags will contain the same legal toolkits and will be distributed to healthcare partners for their patients. This expansion hopes to reach at-risk moms-to-be, as pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. Research shows that nearly 20% of women experience violence during pregnancy, with pregnant adolescents and women with unintended pregnancies at an increased risk.

According to CEO Heather Bellino, "When victims call our legal line it is often the first time they have ever spoken with an attorney to learn that they have rights and that they can get protection and safety. It is a life-altering moment. Handbags for Hope arms them with one of the strongest tools to break the cycle of violence – access to legal services."

#### **Texas Advocacy Project Particulars**

In 2020, TAP served 4,767 clients, impacting the lives of nearly 10,106 survivors and their children. Their mission is to end dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in Texas. TAP empowers survivors through free legal services and access to the justice system, and advances prevention through public outreach and education. Details at [www.TexasAdvocacyProject.org](http://www.TexasAdvocacyProject.org). If you need help, call 800-374-HOPE.

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