

AG Schimel: Offers training, funding and statewide address confidentiality program to victims of domestic violence

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MADISON, Wis. – October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Attorney General Brad Schimel is reminding the public about resources and support available to victims of domestic violence and those in fear of abuse through the state's address confidentiality program, training for law enforcement, and grant funding for victim services in all 72 Wisconsin counties.

"I have worked in the criminal justice system for 28 years, and I have seen how abuse and the fear of abuse can take a physical, emotional, and psychological toll on families," said Attorney General Schimel. "At DOJ, we are committed to serving survivors of domestic violence by providing real resources so all Wisconsinites can feel safe and secure."

Safe at Home, launched in April 2017, provides victims of domestic abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, trafficking, and those who fear for their physical safety with a legal substitute address and free mail forwarding service. Enrollment in Safe at Home allows victims of abuse and those who fear for their physical safety to maintain a confidential home, work, or school address and use a secure, legal address provided by DOJ. In six months, Safe at Home has expanded to serve 203 active participants, including 108 children, in 95 Wisconsin households. Also, there are now 320 application assistants across the state who assist participants with safety planning and applying for the program, up from 60 application assistants designated when the program launched just six months ago.

Wisconsin became the 36th state to adopt an address confidentiality program. The program was created after bipartisan legislation, led by authors Senators Scott Fitzgerald and Jennifer Shilling, and Representatives Joel Kleefisch and Chris Taylor, was enacted in 2016 as Wisconsin Act 356. Safe at Home operates through funding provided under the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

To learn more about Safe At Home, visit www.SafeAtHomeWI.gov. To enroll in Safe at Home, call 1-800-446-6564.

DOJ provides nearly \$2.5 million in grant funding, through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) STOP grant, to support prosecutors, advocates, victim/witness services, and law enforcement who are providing services to domestic and sexual violence victims in Wisconsin. Through this grant funding, DOJ supports five regional Violence Against Women resource prosecutors in Brown, Dane, Eau Claire, Milwaukee, and Waukesha counties. These prosecutors provide training and technical assistance to prosecutors around the state who handle domestic violence and sexual assault cases.

Also supported through grant funding, DOJ trains law enforcement on the best practices for responding to and investigating domestic violence. These trainings emphasize officer safety, trauma-informed interview techniques, domestic violence dynamics, developing a coordinated community response, witness intimidation, and lethality assessments. Survivors of domestic violence often provide testimony at these trainings, offering an important perspective as law enforcement learns how to respond to domestic violence incidents. DOJ financially supports special trainings by subject matter experts on the following topics: working with survivors with disabilities, survivors in underserved communities, and responding to stalking and strangulation cases.

DOJ also routinely provides information and trainings to advocates and victim/witness services on victim's rights, crime victim compensation, and the sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE) fund. Additionally, DOJ has created an online version of these training materials for overnight and weekend domestic violence shelter staff. This year, DOJ presented regional trainings for advocates and victim/witness services to enhance their collaboration on domestic violence cases and their understanding on the use of restraining orders and no contact orders.

DOJ works closely with End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, the state domestic violence coalition, who shares the common goal of supporting survivors of domestic

violence. Through DOJ, VAWA funding supports End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's Lethality Assessment Project, which identifies victims of domestic violence who are at high risk for experiencing lethal violence and works to provide support and services to those victims; as well as the coalition's Community Response Program Director. DOJ also provides VAWA funding to the Director of State Courts Office to provide domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking training to judges.

In the future, DOJ will continue to expand its efforts to support victims and stop domestic violence in Wisconsin. For advocates, DOJ will be hosting a regional training series that focuses on better understanding and some best practices for working with corrections staff. DOJ is also working with the American Indians Against Abuse to support tribal domestic violence programs and is developing a tribal law enforcement training program. DOJ has also established, with collaboration from law enforcement, prosecution, advocates, and victim/witness services, a plan through 2020 that is dedicated to supporting trauma-informed training and technical assistance and encourages innovative approaches to responding to domestic and sexual violence.