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The Importance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Muncie Indiana – The month of October offers a time to spotlight domestic violence in Indiana and across our country during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Did you know that domestic violence occurs in all communities and affects individuals from all demographic categories, with at least 1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime?

In Indiana, more than 40 percent of women and more than 26 percent of men experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetime, (according to the most recent data from 2014 – from The State of Domestic Violence Report 2020 Edition and the Domestic Violence Network). This type of violence may include physical, verbal, sexual, or psychological abuse including stalking, harassment, intimidation, isolation, financial control and more. Unfortunately, there are many reasons that make it difficult for domestic violence survivors to leave an abusive relationship (children, pets, finances, housing, love, etc.). This situation may seem difficult for the outside world to understand and collectively it can leave survivors feeling unsupported and hopeless.

“It’s crucial that survivors of domestic violence have the support from our office and community,” said Delaware County Prosecutor Eric Hoffman. “Too often these heinous acts go unreported for a wide variety of reasons, and many victims feel trapped with nowhere to go or are worried no one will believe them. We as a community must educate ourselves on understanding domestic violence and how we can best support victims and their families.”

If you suspect that someone you know is a victim of ongoing domestic abuse, domestic violence and/or sexual assault, advocates recommend you approach that person about it respectfully. It’s important to listen without judgment and help guide them to community services. This may be accomplished through the national domestic violence hotline or by connecting them to a local domestic violence advocate/service provider – the Delaware County Prosecutor’s Office Domestic Violence Victim Advocate which can be

reached at 765-747-7801 ext. 871 or The Better Way at 765-747-9107 or 765-288-HELP.

Advocates urge that it's important for family and friends to understand that leaving an abusive relationship is difficult for many reasons. Try to trust your loved one's judgment on the timing and decisions about their life, but also be supportive and helpful in creating a safety plan for when they are ready to use it. "Domestic violence is a crime that can result in serious injury or even death. If you know that a battering incident is occurring or has taken place, do not hesitate to call 911," said Prosecutor Hoffman.

In Indiana, two bills were passed during the 2023 Indiana legislative session to help protect victims of domestic violence. Senate Enrolled Act 161 increases the penalty for criminals who use GPS tracking devices to stalk, surveil or commit other crimes against victims, including those who are the subject of a protective order. Senate Enrolled Act 158 increases the "cooling off period" or minimum time in jail before potential release on bail to 24 hours for those who commit domestic violence offenses. Previously, this time period was only eight hours. The hope is that this extended time can allow a survivor to connect with resources and go through with a safety plan before the abuser is possibly released from jail.

Survivors who need assistance or support should call the 24-hour domestic violence statewide hotline in Indiana at: **800-332-7385** or visit thehotline.org to call/text/chat with the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

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