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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Georgia Fatality Review Report Released, Findings Highlight Connections Between Domestic Violence-Related Homicide and Stalking

ATLANTA, GA -- The Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) and the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) release the 14th Annual Report of the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project (the Project) on March 6, 2018. Together, these agencies work with communities to conduct in-depth reviews of domestic violence-related fatalities and near-fatalities. Multi-disciplinary teams in 23 judicial circuits have reviewed 106 fatal incidents since the Project began in 2004. The Project aims to learn ways to more fully address the problem of domestic violence and to seek solutions to reduce the number of domestic violence-related deaths and injuries in Georgia.

The Project's 2017 Annual Report focuses on the problem of intimate partner stalking. The Project identified stalking behaviors in 58 percent of its reviewed cases. Stalking is defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Reviewed stalking cases included a pattern of behaviors including: following the victim or showing up at locations where the victim was; driving by the victim's home, school or work; using technology or other methods to monitor, track, or harass the victim; sending unwanted gifts or messages; causing damage to property; threatening to hurt the victim or others; or related actions designed to control and intimidate the victim.

Jennifer Thomas, Executive Director of GCFV, points out, "We focused on intimate partner stalking this year because it is a pervasive problem we do not know enough about. We recognize that stalking behaviors are often overshadowed by other abusive and controlling behaviors within relationships. To address the issue and improve victim safety, we need to be aware of what to look for and how to respond to stalking." Thomas adds, "Prevalence estimates tell us that 312,000 Georgians may be stalked annually. We owe it to those victims and we owe it to the 149 Georgians killed in domestic violence-related incidents during 2017, to understand the problem of stalking and improve our response to it."

The Annual Report's five chapters provide an analysis of stalking behaviors in the context of an intimate partner relationship, discuss the response of the criminal justice system and civil remedies to stalking as well as electronic stalking and tech safety, and makes recommendations for systemic changes to improve safety for victims and accountability for perpetrators of stalking. Key findings in the Report include:

- **Intimate partner stalkers are the most dangerous type of stalker and stalking is a risk factor for homicide.** Intimate partner stalkers utilize multiple strategies to monitor and control victims including surveillance, life invasion, intimidation, and interference.

- **Perpetrators in reviewed stalking cases engaged in threatening and intimidating behaviors at a higher rate.** Perpetrators were more likely to make threats to kill the victim (present in 67 percent) and threaten the victim with a weapon (present in 43 percent).
- **A history of physical assault more prevalent in reviewed stalking cases than in non-stalking cases.** In 95 percent of stalking cases the perpetrator had a history of physically assaulting the victim. Strangulation, a dangerous and lethal form of physical assault, occurred in stalking cases at over twice the rate of non-stalking cases. Perpetrators were twice as likely to have sexually assaulted the victim prior to the homicide than in non-stalking cases.
- **In 74 percent of reviewed stalking cases, a Temporary Protective Order was violated prior to the fatal incident.** These incidents signal missed opportunities to hold perpetrators, who subsequently went on to kill their victims, accountable for ongoing abuse.
- **Homicides in reviewed stalking cases were more likely to occur in “public” spaces,** such as the home of a family member or friend, a parking lot or sidewalk, a workplace or on public land. Thirty-nine percent of fatal incidents in reviewed stalking cases occurred away from the home.
- **Many bystanders witness these tragic events.** Witnesses to the homicide were present in 56 percent of the reviewed stalking cases, 38 percent of the witnesses were children.

Jan Christiansen, Executive Director of GCADV, believes the Report builds on the work being done to address victim safety throughout the state. She says, “The Report is a great tool for change in communities. Its recommendations address issues we see as missed opportunities to intervene, such as removing firearms from dangerous offenders.” She clarifies, “Stalkers in reviewed cases were more likely to threaten the victim with a weapon. Many of the victims had obtained a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) but 71 percent of the victims killed while a TPO was in place died by gunshot. We have to acknowledge that more can be done to address this gap in safety for victims.”

The report will be accessible for free online at www.georgiafatalityreview.com.

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About the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence: GCADV envisions a Georgia free of domestic violence. The mission of GCADV is to collaborate, advocate, educate, and empower. We empower survivors and the programs that serve them, we educate the public, and we advocate for responsive public policy. Our strength is in numbers, as we collaborate throughout Georgia to stop domestic violence. For more information, visit www.gcadv.org.

About the Georgia Commission on Family Violence: GCFV is a state agency created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1992 to develop a comprehensive state plan for ending family violence in Georgia. GCFV works throughout the state to help create and support task forces made up of citizen volunteers working to end domestic violence in their communities. GCFV conducts research and provides training, monitors legislation and policies affecting victims of domestic violence, and certifies Georgia’s Family Violence Intervention Programs. For more information, visit gcfv.georgia.gov.

To obtain resources and support: If you or someone you know is being abused, there are community and statewide resources available to you. Call 1-800-33-HAVEN (English/Spanish/TTY), the 24-hour statewide domestic violence hotline, for a confidential place to get help or find resources.