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Chany Chea
GCADV Communications and Events
Manager
cchea@gcadv.org
404.209.0280 ext. 241

Public Policy Contact

Shenna Morris,
GCADV Director of Policy and Community
Engagement
smorris@gcadv.org
404.209.0280 ext. 191

Georgia Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Groups Urge Lawmakers to Strengthen Family Violence Laws and Protect Victims

ATLANTA, GA - February 4, 2020 - Hundreds gathered at the Georgia State Capitol today to urge legislators to support measures which seek to enhance the safety of domestic and sexual assault survivors. This year's focus areas include support for measures that strengthen safety for victims of domestic violence and address perpetrators' ownership or possession of firearms. Additionally, advocates called for support measures to include dating partners in the definition of family violence and measures that prevent the unintended arrest of victims. Sexual assault advocates continue to work hard statewide to provide support and resources to victims of sexual violence. Sexual assault advocates support Senator Jones on Senate Bill 287 to eliminate the statute of limitations on offenses of rape, aggravated sodomy, and aggravated sexual battery.

"This revision to our law will support a victim centered approach to sexual violence," said Jennifer Bivins, President/CEO at the Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault. "Victims who need time to decide if they want to move forward within the criminal justice system will have that time. Victims deserve time to decide."

Georgia currently ranks 10th in the nation for the rate at which women are killed by men. In the years between 2010 and 2019, over 930 Georgians were killed by firearms in domestic violence incidents. Despite these statistics Georgia has yet to align state law with federal law making it a felony for domestic violence perpetrators who are subject to a Family Violence Protective Order or convicted of a family violence-related misdemeanor to possess a firearm or ammunition. Every neighboring state in the Southeast, including Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida, has enacted legislation limiting perpetrators access to firearms. States that have laws which include individuals subject to domestic violence restraining orders see an 8 to 13 percent reduction in intimate partner homicide rates and a 25 percent reduction in intimate partner gun homicides in their cities.

"The data shows us this type of legislation saves lives. It is time that Georgia follows our neighboring states and enacts legislation to help keep victims of domestic violence safe and alive. Safety is a right that everybody deserves," said Jan Christiansen, Executive Director at the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV).

Including dating partners in the definition of family violence would provide victims broader protections and the appropriate resources and responses needed in maintaining safety. GCADV member programs have reported that many survivors, particularly teenage survivors, do not meet the criteria for Family Violence Protective Orders, which are available

to persons who have lived together or have had children with their abusive partner. These survivors are left without protection, their level of risk is further compounded by perpetrators' possession of firearms. More than half of all intimate partner homicides are committed by dating partners. Research shows that when states broaden their firearm prohibition laws beyond federal law to cover abusive dating partners, the states experience a 16% reduction in intimate partner gun homicides.

"We hear from domestic programs and see so often in media reports the lethal intersection between these two issues. The experiences we heard from survivors this morning reminds us of not only the direct impact it causes on them but also of the potential risk and impact posed on the larger community," said Shenna Morris, Director of Policy and Community Engagement at GCADV. "Legislative solutions to increase the number of protective options available to survivors of dating violence and that address the ability of those who cause harm to own or retain a firearm can ultimately move us further along in creating a state where everyone feels safe."

According to the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), from October 2018 through September 2019, Georgia's 47 state-certified domestic violence programs answered nearly 52,282 crisis calls and provided shelter to 7,214 survivors and their children. During that same period, Georgia's 28 state-funded sexual assault programs answered approximately 10,400 crisis calls and served 5,085 victims of rape and sexual assault, including 1,989 child victims. These statistics remind us that domestic violence and sexual assault are epidemics. Stop Violence Against Women Day provides an opportunity for Georgia constituents, domestic violence advocates, and sexual assault advocates to communicate the need for the state to be vigilant in the quest to end domestic and sexual violence.

To find a domestic violence program near you, call Georgia's 24-Hour Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline - 1.800.33.HAVEN (1.800.334.2836)

To find a sexual assault center near you, visit www.gnesa.org or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline - 1.800.656.HOPE (1.800.656.4673)

STAY CONNECTED:



Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence,
114 New Street, Suite B, Decatur, GA 30030

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