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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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***District Attorney Ferman, Along With County Commission Chair Josh Shapiro, Sheriff Eileen Behr and Other County Leaders, Announces the Release of First County Wide Cyber-Bullying and Bullying Task Force Report: Montco is First PA County to Create Comprehensive County-Wide Plan to Tackle Most Challenging Issue Facing Youth***

Montgomery County District Attorney Risa Vetri Ferman, along with the Montgomery County Commission Chair Josh Shapiro, Montgomery County Sheriff Eileen Behr, Montgomery County Schools and Intermediate Unit, and the Montgomery County Police Chiefs, announce the creation and release of the Montgomery County Cyber-Bullying and Bullying Task Force Report/Manual. This countywide manual is now available for all school entities and educational personnel in Montgomery County, along with any agencies or groups or individuals who need a resource to address cyber-bullying and bullying among youth. The manual is designed to offer best practices in prevention, response and accountability for cyber-bullying and bullying. It is designed as a comprehensive resource for anyone facing the modern challenges of cyber-bullying/bullying.

In 2012, the District Attorney convened the Montgomery County Cyber Bullying and Bullying Task Force, a 25 member, multi-disciplinary task force convened for the purpose of developing a comprehensive strategy to addresses the complex issues associated with incidents of cyber-bullying and bullying.

Julie Knudsen, a Norristown Area School District Social Worker, was designated as the Task Force Coordinator. Mrs. Knudsen developed a team of professionals from a variety of fields which included representatives from the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General, the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety, law enforcement, school districts, the Montgomery County Office of Behavioral Health, community behavioral health agencies, the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, the Montgomery Conflict Mediation Center and the Montgomery County Juvenile Probation Department.

Over the last year, this dedicated interdisciplinary team collaborated to formulate a set a recommendations targeting three sub-group areas; prevention/education, intervention and accountability. All of the recommendations contained in the Cyber-bullying/Bullying Task Force Manual are based upon current best practice standards. This manual is meant to be used as a resource for all schools in order to support our countywide effort in preventing and responding to bullying and cyber-bullying incidents.

Law enforcement agencies also play a critical role in the investigation of bullying and cyber-bullying offenses. Due to the unique challenges posed by digital technology advances in this area, a separate manual was developed by selected law enforcement subcommittee members of this Task Force, for the purpose of providing guidance in effective and prompt investigative techniques. Brian Kozera, Norristown Police Officer and School Resource Officer for the Norristown Area School District, spearheaded the efforts in creating this essential resource to assist all law enforcement officers.

"This comprehensive initiative is the first of its kind in Pennsylvania because it represents a countywide effort to effectively address and combat all aspects of bullying and cyber-bullying. We are hopeful that our coordinated strategy containing prevention tools, reporting requirements and accountability measures will provide a framework for other counties throughout the Commonwealth. The collaborative efforts of many dedicated individuals from the community, law enforcement and educational facilities hold the promise for unprecedented success. Bringing people to the table from various disciplines for the purpose of better serving all citizens, is a consistent practice here in Montgomery County. I am proud to be part of this county team, where the contributions of many, help to create extraordinary results," said District Attorney Ferman.

Juvenile Court Administrative Judge, and the Chair of the Montgomery County Children's Roundtable, the Honorable Wendy Demchick-Alloy addressed the seriousness of cyber-bullying and bullying in dealing with today's youth. "Bullying/Cyber-bullying is a critical issue facing our county's children, causing immeasurable damage, sometimes to an individual and other times, to an entire community, school or otherwise. The efforts of the Anti-Bullying/Cyber-bullying Task Force resulting in the Task Force Manual will go a long way in addressing and combating this daunting problem. Per the Task Force's recommendations in the manual, collaborative work by all who serve our county's children, i.e. schools, social services, law enforcement, courts, among others, is precisely the way to attack this urgent and pervasive problem."

Many Montgomery County Departments participated in the Task Force. "This initiative highlights why I am so proud to be a commissioner in Montgomery County, where it is the rule, and not the exception, that our professionals from all departments work together for the protection of children. Being a father of four young children, I understand the ramifications and complexities around this issue. As commissioners, we are always looking for ways to improve the quality of life for all citizens in Montgomery County, and we are extremely pleased with the work of this task force, which proactively creates solutions," said Montgomery County Commission Chair Josh Shapiro.

Norristown School District Superintendent Dr. Janet Samuels spoke in support of the collaborative effort to address this serious issue facing youth and stated, "Regardless of age or demographics, bullying and cyber-bullying have taken center stage. Bullying and cyber-bullying have no geographic boundaries, which leads to the complexity of the matter. Every student should come to school feeling safe and ready to learn. This manual is a gift for all students, parents, educators and administrators and provides much needed guidance. Districts from across Montgomery County will benefit immensely from this manual and the clear, concise valuable tools and resources provided to address this important issue."

Law enforcement plays a crucial role in addressing bullying and cyber-bullying. The Montgomery County Police Chiefs Association recognizes that "while bullying has been a problem for a long time, now, due to advances in technology, the problem of cyber-bullying is growing exponentially. Young people now have in their hands, literally, very convenient devices to bully and harass others in an impersonal manner, but with very personal results. The District Attorney's Task Force has generated, in this manual, a very practical guide for police officers and school officials to better understand the issues involved in cyber-bullying that will result in enhanced prevention, investigation, and intervention. And more importantly, this manual provides victims and parents with resources to deal with this problem that has impacted so many Montgomery County communities," said Chief Thomas Medwid, President of the Montgomery County Police Chiefs Association and Chief of the Lower Salford Police Department.

District Attorney Ferman commends and thanks both Julie Knudsen and Norristown Police Officer Brian Kozera for their leadership and exemplary work, and extends her sincere appreciation to all of the Task Force members for their dedication in producing these manuals, which will prove to be a vital tool in helping to protect victims and hold offenders accountable.

Copies of the Task Force Manual are available upon request.

Approved for release:

Risa Vetri Ferman