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Sheriff's Office, Laurel House and Women's Center partner for greater domestic violence awareness and victim support

Norristown, PA (November 3, 2016) – Montgomery County Sheriff Sean P. Kilkenny and local domestic violence agencies are deepening their relationship, in an effort to better serve the increasing need for domestic violence victim services. Kilkenny and all of his staff have completed two days of mandatory domestic violence awareness training with Laurel House and the Women's Center of Montgomery County. The training focused on understanding domestic violence, the impact it has on victims, safety planning and local resources.



PHOTO: MCSO Cpl. Carl Robinson, Womens' Center Community Educator Specialist Robin Jordan and Program Director Denise Flynn, Laurel House Domestic Abuse Response Team member Stacy Dougherty and MCSO Dep. Kayla Oelschlager.

"I will continue to build on my commitment to help support and advocate for domestic violence victims," said Kilkenny.

In addition to the updated training, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office is part of the Domestic Violence Legal Network, collects 9-1-1 phones for victims, and donates old cellphones to support domestic violence hotlines. Deputies also provide supervision during child custody exchanges; escort victims in fear of confronting their abusers, in around the courthouse; and retrieve weapons, which are to be surrendered in protection from abuse order cases.

"Through our daily duties, we come in contact with hundreds of citizens each day," said Chief Deputy T. Michael Beaty. "We are committed to making sure that we are able to immediately serve victims in the most educated and compassionate way."

In other counties, protection from abuse orders are mailed, or delivered by a constable for a fee. However, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office has a dedicated team of deputies, who hand deliver the court orders as a part of their service. As a result of the additional training, office and law enforcement staff, are better equipped to immediately help victims get the resources and assistance they need, even before speaking with someone at either of the domestic violence agencies.

Laurel House is a nonprofit domestic shelter, which provides counseling, a 24-hour hotline, legal advocacy and an immediate in-person response team. The agency reported 1,700 hotline calls, which is a 25 percent increase over the previous year. Laurel House also experienced a 50 percent increase in Domestic Abuse Response Team Program crisis response calls, and provided more than 7,300 hours of individual counseling hours to clients.

"I am not aware of any other sheriff's office in the state that provides this level of service," said Laurel House Domestic Abuse Response Team Member Stacy Dougherty. "We need as many resources as possible out in the community."

At the risk of suffering backlash from an abuser, victims may be hesitant to ask questions or receive help, especially if the abuser is present. Having trained resources, who can detect or assist victims on the spot is critical.

"We have already seen the impact of our training, said the Women's Center Community Educator Specialist Robin Jordan. "Sheriff's Office deputies accompanied two victims to our Legal Advocacy Project Office the day after the training."

The Women's Center nonprofit domestic violence victim agency also provides a way for victims to get help discreetly through their Permission Slip Program. The program allows law enforcement officers to get permission from the victim to be contacted by a representative from the Women's Center of Montgomery County, who can work with the victim before, during and after the PFA hearing and court process.

The Women's Center served 5,000 victims in 2015. They served 1,700 victims in the first quarter of 2016, which puts them on track to surpass last year's figures.

"The theme for the training was 'See something. Say something,'" said Women's Center Program Director Denise Flynn. "This opportunity allowed us to further collaborate with the Sheriff's Office to help empower victims, and sheriff's deputies by providing them the resources they need to help as they perform their daily jobs."

"I hope that, after this training, we are able to better support Laurel House, the Women's Center and victims, by being an extended resource," said Kilkenny.

Laurel House's mission is to advocate and empower those impacted by domestic violence by providing crisis intervention, safe haven, supportive programs and resources; as well as to advance

social change through preventative education and through community training and collaboration to foster a coordinated response to domestic abuse. For more information about Laurel House, please visit www.laurel-house.org.

The Women's Center of Montgomery County is a volunteer, community organization with a primary focus on freedom from domestic violence and other forms of abuse. For more information about the Women's Center of Montgomery County, visit www.wcmontco.org.

The mission of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office is to protect the citizens of the county, and to provide services to taxpayers with honesty, integrity and transparency without regard to race, color, gender, religious creed, sexual orientation, age, origin, ancestry, economic status, handicap or disability.

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