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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

Muncie Indiana – October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. While domestic violence and intimate partner abuse is something that should be first and foremost in our minds every month, October is a chance to raise awareness about something that effects every single community in Indiana.

As the Delaware County Prosecutor, I wanted to take a moment to talk about the sweeping nature of domestic violence and give the residents of our community some helpful tips on how we can come together to combat it.

In Indiana, more than 40 percent of women and 27 percent of men experience some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. This can be physical, verbal or sexual abuse or psychological abuse such as stalking. During these past two years of the pandemic, abusers and victims have been forced to stay home together without much outside interaction or access to victim services. This, coupled with major increased family stressors like loss of employment or financial strain, can and, most likely will, lead to an increase of abuse and violence.

Too often, domestic violence goes unreported for a variety of reasons. Make sure to safely check in on your friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances. Know the signs of potential abuse. Some are easier to identify than others, such as: bruises, black eyes or unexplained injuries, especially if the person you suspect might be a victim has constant excuses for those injuries. Other signs of physically or emotionally abusive and controlling relationships can be more difficult to spot. These may include: abrupt personality changes, loss of self-esteem, constantly checking in with their partner, frequently changing plans and not visiting family or friends, never having any money on hand, worrying about pleasing their partner, and more. If you think someone you know may be suffering from abuse, don't be silent. Talk to the person you are worried about and share your concerns. Listen to them and let them know that you care and are available to help. Continue to check in on them and don't be afraid to alert the authorities and direct them to available resources. Our in house domestic violence victim advocate has a wealth of resources to share with victims.

Our office takes domestic violence very seriously and we want to do everything we can to eliminate it in our county and state. We are fortunate enough to have an entire domestic violence/crimes against women unit within our office. During the past legislative session, prosecutors advocated for two new laws to combat domestic violence. The first was Senate Enrolled Act 79 which toughens penalties in domestic battery cases where the defendant has a prior conviction for strangulation. Strangulation is a particularly concerning crime as it is one of the worst violent and dangerous acts that can be committed against a person. The second new law passed was Senate Enrolled Act 81, which provided for additional training for police officers on how to properly investigate sexual assault cases.

Let's all press pause on our busy schedules and take a little extra time to check on the safety of our friends, family and neighbors, and let's work together to reduce the number of Hoosiers suffering from the impacts of domestic violence.

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