ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Dear Editor:

The recent deaths in our community from domestic violence have exposed an epidemic of violence in our society that is largely invisible, affecting one in three women and one in six men, according to the Center for Disease Control. It is by far the most common form of violent crime in Ulster County, and accounts for more than 80% of individuals receiving support from our Crime Victim Assistance Program.

I sympathize with every survivor, advocate, and concerned citizen seeking to end this scourge. Ulster County has long prioritized support for victims and survivors, and remains dedicated to reducing the incidence of violence. We can and should do more: In partnership with the District Attorney's Office and Crime Victims Assistance Program, we are creating a working group of the Intimate Partner Violence Intervention Taskforce to get direct input from survivors to assess gaps in our system of prevention and protection. We must also work hand-in-hand with local police and the courts, because keeping residents safe is a shared responsibility.

If you are a victim of domestic or intimate partner violence, you can call the Ulster County Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) 24-hour hotline at (845) 340-3442. CVAP staff provide direct, comprehensive support to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and intimate-partner violence, including real-time safety planning, court accompaniment, help in securing orders of protection, home security support like cameras and lock replacement, bedside advocacy during in-County forensic exams, and ongoing emotional and practical support. Family of Woodstock and the Crisis Support Center in Kingston also provide 24/7 support services to survivors of intimate partner violence.

In addition to CVAP, Ulster County has a coordinated, multi-agency domestic violence response that includes the Intimate Partner Violence Intervention Task Force and the Interagency Council on Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking — an interdisciplinary team that includes social services, health, mental health, the District Attorney, and law enforcement agencies, among others. The County’s work spans awareness-raising and prevention, protection and support for victims and survivors, and holding abusers accountable.

The Crime Victim Assistance Program staff also support our schools. Through the State’s “Enough is Enough” Program, they help provide services at SUNY Ulster and SUNY New Paltz to student survivors of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. The team also provides educational programming in elementary, middle, and high schools.

Earlier this year, the State Legislature passed a bill, awaiting the Governor's signature, to establish a statewide Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) — a nationally recognized tool to identify high-risk domestic violence cases and connect victims to services immediately. Ulster County is moving forward with LAP even before the legislation is signed: In August we worked with our Legislature to adopt a County LAP policy modeled on the state legislation. The Saugerties Police Department was an early adopter, and its officers are already fully trained and using LAP. The County will be expanding LAP training to include the Rosendale Police Department in the coming months and is developing LAP training protocols for interested law enforcement agencies. Ultimately, our goal is to have all law enforcement agencies trained in the LAP screening process.

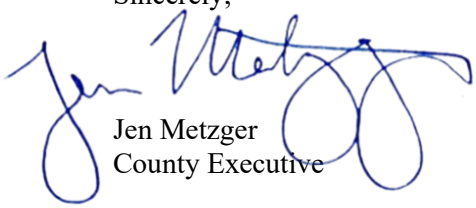
Training law enforcement is a very important part of the County's work. The Crime Victims Assistance Program, in partnership with the Westchester County Domestic Violence High Risk Team, is actively providing enhanced domestic violence and sexual violence training to police agencies right now, and is organizing a large-scale training for Domestic Violence Month in October for all enforcement agencies. The County's Intimate Partner Violence Intervention Team also provides training and education to individual local departments.

I look forward to continuing to work with our partners in government, law enforcement, and the community to build on our ongoing efforts to combat domestic violence and save lives. Ironically and unfortunately, as we seek to expand this important work, New York State is cutting funding to the County's Crime Victims Assistance Program by nearly 54%. These cuts threaten the very programs that save lives, and I urge residents to contact the Governor's Office and the State Office for Victim Services to advocate for restoring this vital funding.

For interested community members, the Ulster County Crime Victims Assistance Program trains and certifies volunteers as rape crisis counselors for the County's crisis hotline. For more information, please contact 845-340-3443.

Ultimately, it takes all of us working together to end the scourge of domestic violence, working with urgency, compassion, and coordination. Lives depend on it.

Sincerely,



Jen Metzger
County Executive