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- PRESS RELEASE -

BYSIEWICZ JOINS HARTFORD MAYOR, POLICE CHIEF IN PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

'SAFE AT HOME' ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM ADMINISTERED THROUGH SECRETARY OF THE STATE'S OFFICE – CONCEALS VICTIMS' ADDRESS AND PERSONAL INFORMATION FROM ALL STATE RECORDS

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz today joined Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez, Hartford Police Chief Darryl Roberts and advocates for victims of domestic and sexual violence in launching a public awareness campaign to promote the 'Safe at Home' address confidentiality program. The 'Safe at Home' program, administered through the Secretary of the State's Office since 2004, conceals from all state documents and records – including court papers – the addresses and any personal information of domestic violence and sexual assault victims who fear for their safety.

"The numbers paint an alarming picture," said Secretary Bysiewicz. "Last year alone more than 47,000 people in Connecticut received services at shelters for domestic violence victims – that's nearly 130 every day. We want the victims of domestic and sexual violence who fear for their safety to know that they are not alone – we are here to help. Signing up for the Safe at Home program is one way to protect your family from your abuser and move on with your life."

According to the Connecticut State Police, more than 75% of the victims of family violence are women and children. The FBI reports that nationwide a woman is battered every 15 seconds. Members of the law enforcement community and victims' advocates agree that one of the most frustrating problems encountered when trying to stop domestic or sexual violence is the unwillingness of victims to come forward and name their abuser.

Often, the victims feel shame for themselves and stigmatized in their communities. They fear for their lives and believe that involving law enforcement by giving a statement and creating a police file will only endanger them or their children even further.

The Safe at Home program is a very simple way for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking who fear for their safety to make their home address and phone number permanently confidential. Once a victim enrolls in the program, their address, phone number and any personal information will be unattainable through any state government documents such as driving records, court papers, voter registration files, library records, employment security and others.

The Safe at Home program is designed to help survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking who have had to move out of their homes with their families to find safety, and those who are planning to move. Keeping personal information private once a victim moves out is key to protecting the safety of their family. The Safe at Home program provides participants with a substitute address to which all first-class mail is sent. The Secretary of the State's Office then forwards mail to the victim's new actual home address.

"This program is secure and effective and we are proud to work together to run this critical service with local law enforcement and advocates for the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault throughout the state of Connecticut," said Secretary Bysiewicz.

Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez said, "'Safety is a top priority here in Hartford, especially for our most vulnerable residents. This program will help prevent crime, promote safety and nurture a positive family environment. I want to thank the Secretary of the State for her leadership and for putting Connecticut families first," says Mayor Eddie A. Perez.

Working with Secretary Bysiewicz to publicize the program are law enforcement officers throughout Connecticut, the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) and the Connecticut Coalition against Domestic Violence (CCADV).

Agnes Maldonado, Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence said, "I am very proud to see this program underway in Connecticut. It is a substantial help to countless victims, most of whom are likely to be women and families leaving abusive situations. Allowing victims to protect the confidentiality of their actual residence may ultimately save their lives."

Nancy Kushins, Executive Director of CONNSACS, said, "Survivors of sexual assault face a long and difficult healing process. Privacy, and the ability to control one's personal information, is fundamental to healing and safety for sexual assault survivors. The Safe at Home program is one tool that can provide sexual assault survivors the ability to keep their address private."

More information about the Safe at Home program is available by:

- calling the 24-hour toll free CCADV hotline at 888-774-2900 or by going online to www.ctcadv.org

- calling the 24-hour toll free hotline for CONNSACS at 888-999-5545 or by going online to www.connsacs.org
- going online to the Secretary of the State's website www.sots.ct.gov