Georgia Fatality Review Report Released,
Domestic Violence Deaths at 10 Year High

[ATLANTA, GA, March 8, 2016] – Today, the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) and the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) released their 12th annual Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report (Report). Together, these statewide agencies coordinate the Fatality Review Project (Project) and work with local fatality review teams to conduct in-depth reviews. The Report analyzes domestic violence-related homicides and near-homicides in the state and provides recommendations for systemic change with the objective of lowering homicide rates.

Unfortunately, Georgia had a significant increase in domestic violence-related homicides in 2015. The Project recorded 139 domestic violence-related deaths – the highest number of deaths ever recorded by the Project in the past 10 years. Eighty percent of these deaths were caused by firearms – the highest percentage of firearm-related deaths since the Project began recording this data five years ago.

The Report explores the lasting impact these deaths have on surviving family members, friends, and the community. It centers on the true story of Trisha (pseudonym used), one of the 134 children under the age of 18 who lost a parent or caregiver in the 100 cases reviewed by the Project. Trisha lost her mother to domestic violence as a child and later escaped an abusive relationship. Trisha shares her memories as a child witnessing the abuse inflicted by her stepfather on her mother, her experience hearing the devastating news of her mother’s death at the age of 14, and the impact the loss of her mother has in her life.

The Report pulls from Trisha’s story to address the potential impact of domestic violence exposure on children and the challenges children and families face in the aftermath of a domestic violence homicide. It also addresses another tragedy impacting children exposed to domestic violence: murder-suicide and familicide*.

Some of the key findings in this year’s Report:

- **At least 12,000 children in Georgia are exposed to domestic violence annually and that exposure can have serious effects on children.** More than 62,000 children were on the scene of family violence calls made between 2010 and 2014 with even more children exposed to incidents not reported to law enforcement. Long-term exposure to domestic violence can lead to problems with physical health, behavioral problems and emotional difficulties.

- **Many children witness the homicide of their parent.** More than one third of children in reviewed cases actually witnessed the killing of their parent or caregiver in reviewed cases. Many others were the first to find their parent’s body.

- **Children are killed in domestic violence homicides.** Since 2010, the Project has recorded 17 incidents of familicides in Georgia resulting in 52 deaths; 20 children were killed, 4 of whom were adults. Men perpetrated all of these incidents and 82 percent involved firearms.
- **Children who lose a parent to domestic violence homicide face challenges and need services.** After a homicide, many children’s lives are upheaved and a myriad of challenges lay ahead of them, including trauma, identity conflicts and custody arrangements. Support and guidance is often left to family members who may not be aware of the services that are available to help.

- **Surviving family members also face challenges and may also need services.** Many surviving family members report feelings of helplessness, guilt and grief, frustration with the criminal legal system, economic hardships and challenges relating to parenting children of the deceased parent.

- **Children exposed to domestic violence are resilient but need our help to succeed.** If children of domestic violence-homicides are to flourish, they must have outside support, like caring relationships, positive role models and community resources to build their self-control, confidence and positive outlooks.

“The 2015 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report is an incredible look into the lasting impact of domestic violence on the lives of children and loved ones who live with this horrible scourge and who survive,” says Jan Christiansen, Executive Director of GCADV. “Resiliency, courage and pain are all explored as we read Trisha’s story. Her brave retelling of her childhood memories, the stories she was told, her truth, and how it all shaped her life can’t help but stir one’s soul and bring us to think about all of the children who have and do survive similar circumstances. This report is our most bold to date as we address the harsh realities of the bearing of childhood experiences on their futures.”

“The loss of a family member to domestic violence homicide has a lasting impact on survivors and generations to come,” says Jennifer Thomas, Executive Director of GCFV. “We must remember that at each event, each holiday, each meal, there is an empty chair at their table. This Report offers us the opportunity to identify systemic gaps that not only precede domestic violence-related homicides, but also gaps in services that exist for many children and families in their aftermath. The recommendations in this Report hold tremendous potential to significantly impact the lives of domestic violence victims, their children and families. Together, we can honor the lives of deceased victims and work to prevent future homicides in Georgia.”

To access the report for free online, visit [www.georgiafatalityreview.com](http://www.georgiafatalityreview.com).

If you or someone you know is being abused, there are community and statewide resources available to you. Call 1-800-33-HAVEN (voice/TTY), the toll-free, statewide, 24-hour hotline, for a confidential place to get help or find resources. Se habla Español.

*A familiaricide is the deliberate killing of a current or former spouse or intimate partner and one or more of the children within a relatively short period of time. This is often followed by the suicide of the perpetrator.

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**About GCADV**

GCADV envisions a Georgia free of domestic violence. The mission of GCADV is to collaborate, advocate, educate, and empower. We empower survivors and the programs that serve them, we educate the public, and we advocate for responsive public policy. Our strength is in numbers, as we collaborate throughout Georgia to stop domestic violence. For more information, visit [www.gcadv.org](http://www.gcadv.org).

**About GCFV**

The Georgia Commission on Family Violence was created in 1992 by the Georgia General Assembly. The Commission is charged with the development of a comprehensive state plan for ending family violence in Georgia. For more information, visit [gcfv.georgia.gov](http://gcfv.georgia.gov).