

Hotline Reports 15 Percent Increase in Call Volume Over Past Year

AUSTIN, TEXAS (June 15, 2005) – The National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) today reported a 15 percent increase in the demand for family violence services over the past year. Citing a 134 percent increase in the number of calls answered by the Hotline since its creation in 1996, Executive Director Sheryl Cates said it's clear that family violence prevention programs and services are being utilized by increasing numbers of families who experience domestic abuse.

“The demand for services grows so much from year to year that we recognize there is still a lot of work to do to help victims, batterers and their children lead violence-free lives,” Cates said. “That's why it's so important that funding for local and national family violence prevention services such as the Hotline be preserved. Our work positively impacts families and communities, and saves lives.”

The 15 percent increase is based on the number of nationwide calls to the Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE, between May 31, 2004 and May 31, 2005. Last month alone, the Hotline received 17,767 total calls.

Monday's release of a report by the U.S. Department of Justice painted family violence as a trend on the decline in America. The report, *Family Violence Statistics*, concludes that between 1993 and 2002, the rate of family violence dropped by half.

Yet, since its inception in 1996, the Hotline, which was established by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1996, has to date answered more than 1,240,000 calls and experienced continual increases in call volume. Hotline callers are victims of family violence, their family members and their friends, as well as advocates, social workers and others who assist families experiencing domestic violence.

“Overall, what we are seeing is that more programs are reaching families before the situation becomes a crisis warranting police protection,” Cates said. “They're being exposed to the local resources, thanks to the funding VAWA provides programs to spread the intervention message. So we see this as further evidence that VAWA is working.”

Advocates for family violence victims cite two problems with criminal justice data: First, such records do not fully complete the picture of family violence incident rates or trends, and second,

the true measurement of the needs of domestic violence victims can only be measured by the demand for domestic violence prevention services.

Cates said criminal justice statistics do not account for all incidents of domestic violence. DOJ figures account for *reported* family violence crimes; the data does not include unreported crimes, nor non-criminal family abuse, nor does it include violence between persons involved in an intimate relationship but not living together – which accounts for a significant number of incidents. Also, many people are hesitant to report their victimization to police or other authorities, but will instead call the Hotline or turn to a local program or shelter for help, she said.

Further complicating the effort to account for rates of domestic violence is the fact that multiple incidents in one household are counted as one incident even if there are multiple victims.

“We have to be very careful when citing statistical reports that we don’t create the perception that anyone actually has a handle on the rate of domestic violence in America,” Cates said. “The truth is, domestic violence is rampant and diverse, and it’s still something no one wants to talk about. The social stigma presents an enormous obstacle to accounting for whether things are improving or getting worse for victims of this type of violence.”