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IN RESPONSE TO PUBLIC OUTCRY, HUD ATTEMPTS TO PROTECT VICTIM SAFETY, BUT FALLS SHORT

OCTOBER 18, 2004 (WASHINGTON, DC) - The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) recognizes HUD’s recent attempt to address victim safety within its mandated human tracking system Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). Unfortunately, the clarification released October 15 does not fully address the lethal safety concerns victims of domestic violence and their advocates have about their participation with this system.

HUD’s human tracking database shares detailed information about victims of domestic violence, including their location, with a wide variety of agencies in a community. Many people have or can gain access to that data. While HUD has now responded to these safety concerns by allowing some domestic violence programs to refrain from sharing names and social security numbers, other personal data that could easily identify a woman will be shared. Abusers frequently stalk their victims using any available resource, and this shared data will give batterers another way to track and harm victims of domestic violence. Because victims are in greatest danger as they attempt to separate from abusive partners, absolute confidentiality is a central tenant of all services provided to battered women.

"In response to public outcry, HUD has made an attempt to change their policy," states Lynn Rosenthal, NNEDV Executive Director. "Without a full exemption, however, these databases will continue to violate the core promise of confidentiality."

HUD had originally allowed domestic violence programs to provide non-identifying information and aggregate totals. It also protected individual victims who used other important community services such as food banks. In August, HUD released final regulations that forced programs to divulge identifying information about victims. Advocates have worked to return to the original guidelines, which met HUD’s goals while protecting victims.

“There is no firewall or level of encryption that will prevent an abuser from gaining access to these human tracking systems,” says Cindy Southworth, Director of Technology. “Abusers work in all fields – as system administrators, in housing authorities or nonprofit organizations – victims must be exempt from these databases to ensure their safety.”

Please visit www.nnedv.org/hmis for background materials on HMIS and its negative impact of victims of domestic violence.

The National Network to End Domestic Violence is a membership and advocacy organization of state domestic violence coalitions, allied organizations and supportive individuals. NNEDV is the leading voice among domestic violence advocates, developing policy that changes the way this country deals with this complex and far-reaching problem. Safety Net: the National Safe and Strategic Technology Project at NNEDV educates victims of domestic and sexual violence, their advocates, and the general public on how to use technology strategically to help escape violence and find safety. The Project has trained over 7,000 hotline advocates, police officers and prosecutors on how to identify and hold perpetrators accountable for misusing technology. The Safety Net Project works with courts to keep survivors' information off the Internet and addresses the security and privacy of databases housing vital and confidential information about victims.

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