

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE HIGHLIGHTS TRAGIC  
NORTH CAROLINA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASE***

*August 2009 issue of O, The Oprah Magazine brings attention to the deadly crime of domestic violence and a North Carolina woman's fight for justice*

**DURHAM, NC (July 15, 2009)**— The magazine's featured article, *Why Didn't They Stop Him?*, by Phoebe Zerwick, an award-winning North Carolina journalist, tells the story of the brutal murder of a 17-year-old girl and the near-fatal stabbing of her mother by the mother's estranged husband in Jonesville, NC. The story, told as a heart-wrenching narrative, details repeated failures by the justice system in Yadkin County to protect Vernetta Cockerham and her daughter Candice.

"Violation of a domestic violence protective order is a serious crime and is a red flag to the court system that the offender's behavior may escalate to a homicide," said Beth Froehling, the deputy director of the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "If we want offenders to obey protective orders, then violations must be strictly enforced with meaningful consequences."

Cockerham filed a lawsuit in 2004 against the Jonesville Police Department for its failure to enforce a protective order against her estranged husband in the days leading up to her daughter's murder. She recently won a \$430,000 settlement in the lawsuit and volunteers with the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence as an advocate for victims.

"Cockerham's case underscores the importance of training so that police officers, district attorneys, judges and other court officials understand how to identify victims in cases of domestic violence and enforce protective orders appropriately," said Jessie Croom, co-chair of NCCADV's board of directors and member of SOAR (Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships).

- more -

Last year the coalition worked to pass House Bill 44 to strengthen the enforcement of domestic violence protective orders by reducing the number of prior convictions required from 3 to 2 to charge an offender with a Class H felony. This legislation became effective December 1, 2008.

This year the coalition is supporting House Bill 1464 which is pending in the General Assembly and strengthens the state's law by leaving no doubt that police officers shall make an arrest when they have probable cause to believe that certain provisions of a protective order have been violated. "We are referring to this bill as *Candice's Law* in honor of Vernetta's daughter who was murdered," Froehling said.

According to data collected by the coalition, 38 women, children, and men have been murdered in NC so far in 2009 because of domestic violence. "We must work together and do everything we can as a community and as a state to protect victims and hold abusers accountable so that we can reduce homicides. No one should ever have to suffer as Vernetta Cockherham has," said Froehling. "We admire her courage and strength in moving forward and sharing her experience in the hopes that others will be saved."

## **About NCCADV**

The **North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCCADV)** is a statewide non-profit membership organization providing support services to local domestic violence agencies and allied professionals. NCCADV was founded in 1981 and provides training and technical assistance to 90 domestic violence programs throughout the state of North Carolina. The purpose of NCCADV is to strengthen the network of people working to end domestic violence in NC. NCCADV also advocates to improve statewide policies and legislation to positively impact the lives of victims of domestic violence and their children.

## **Links**

The N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence: <http://www.nccadv.org>

O, The Oprah Magazine: <http://www.oprah.com/article/omagazine/200908-omag-domestic-violence>

Phoebe Zerwick: [www.PhoebeZerwick.com](http://www.PhoebeZerwick.com)