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## **New Technology to Help Domestic Violence Hot Line: *Monthly Call Volume Jump from 7,000 in 1996 to 16,500 in 2005***

By Associated Press (<http://www.ap.org/>)

**AUSTIN, Texas** – The last thing a battered woman wants to hear when she calls the National Domestic Violence Hot Line is a busy signal.

But that was happening more frequently in recent years, as the hot line's equipment struggled to keep up with monthly call volumes that jumped from 7,000 in 1996 to 16,500 today. Hot line workers hope innovative technology unveiled Thursday will put an end to those problems and let them answer more calls, handle them more quickly and help more abused women.

In the two weeks since the system went on line, the average call length has fallen from 20 minutes to between five and seven minutes, said Sheryl Cates, the hot line's executive director. That adds up with workers handling up to 600 calls each day.

"This is truly a day of dreams coming true," Cates said.

The technology, developed and donated by companies including Microsoft, Dell and AOL, includes mapping software, networked computers and 72 phone lines, three times as many as the hot line had before.

Rather than flipping through paper maps and lists of shelters, which often were outdated, hot line workers now can type in the caller's location and use mapping software to find help nearby, whether it's emergency transportation or a shelter with workers who speak her language.

And instead of just giving the victim a list of shelter phone numbers and hoping she has the time and courage to call, hot line workers can make conference calls and find a place that has room. Experts estimate that between 2 million and 4 million women in the United States are battered each year, and more than half of the victims live with children under 12. Government studies have found that on average more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day.

U.S. Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., who wrote the legislation that created the hot line, said a crucial step in reversing those statistics is convincing women they don't have to take the abuse. The hot line's workers are a powerful ally in that fight, he said.

"You give them a reason to believe they can make it," he said. "Women feel empowered to come forward now. They now believe that they have someone behind them, they're not alone." Forty-eight-year-old hotline worker Rose Garcia knows how difficult it is to reach out for help and how devastating it would be to get a busy signal.

Garcia and her three children left her physically and verbally abusive husband 12 1/2 years ago, staying in a Fort Worth shelter until she could rebuild her life. She eventually began volunteering there and then moved to Austin to help open the hotline.

"I thank God today that I am not a statistic," she said. "I can stand tall and have a strong voice and let women know like myself that they can live violence free and succeed in life." To contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline call (800) 799-SAFE or (800) 787-3224 TTY for the deaf. The hot line operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in 140 languages.

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