

Press Release

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SOURCE: National Sexual Violence Resource Center
Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault

Special Project Focusing on Sexual Assault Victims of Hurricane Katrina Schedules May 4th Meeting in New Orleans

Enola Pa, (May 2, 2006) A public meeting scheduled for 1:00 to 5:00 PM on May 4th 2006 in New Orleans offers community members and professionals a unique opportunity to share information, testimonials and concerns about sexual assault victims during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. This meeting is the first in a series of three such meetings to be held throughout Louisiana during May; others will occur in Ruston on May 11th and in Lake Charles on May 25th.

These meetings developed as a joint endeavor by two separate organizations that had independently begun looking at the impact that disasters in general, and Hurricane Katrina in particular, have had on sexual assault victims and relief services. The Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA) with federal funding from the Office of Violence Against Women found common cause with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), also working on an initiative to evaluate and learn about ways to improve safety and prevent sexual violence during disasters and the best way to respond and provide services in a timely and meaningful fashion.

Entitled the *National Sexual Violence Prevention and Response in Disaster Situations Project*, this project is designed to examine how sexual violence was handled in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and in areas accepting evacuees, and to create a report, recommendations, and guidelines for prevention and management of sexual violence in future disaster situations.

Judy Benitez, Executive Director LaFASA, says "Although the meetings are open to the public we encourage people to register. A flyer with registration form is available online at: conference@lafasa.org." All individuals and organizations interested in weighing in on how to prevent and respond to sexual violence in future situations of disaster are asked to attend.

Alisa Klein, NSVRC Special Consultant, explains, "This Project will develop a series of checklists for private citizens, community planners, rape crisis centers, state sexual assault coalitions, medical personnel, law enforcement, disaster relief organizations, and others to assist them in understanding the conditions leading to potential sexual assaults and in developing risk-reduction strategies, preventative measures, and appropriate responses to sexual violence in disasters. The report, guidelines, and checklists are expected to be released and disseminated widely in the fall of 2006."

Benitez asserts “Both organizations understand how important it is for us to turn to the victims and the community, and to all those involved in responding to the disaster so we can learn and properly focus our efforts and report on things that will help us develop better responses, services and policies in the future.”

The NSVRC is a national information and resource center relating to all aspects of sexual violence. It collects and disseminates a wide range of resources on sexual violence including statistics, research, position statements, statutes, training curricula, prevention initiatives and program information. The NSVRC assists coalitions, local programs, advocates and others working to end and prevent sexual violence. For additional information, visit www.nsvrc.org or call toll free 877-739-3895.

Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault is a private non-profit coalition of the state's sexual assault crisis centers and other agencies and individuals concerned about sexual violence. Started in 1983, LaFASA's mission is to work toward ending sexual violence in Louisiana, through education, program support, and social change. For more information, see www.lafasa.org and www.louisianaraperelief.org.

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