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**Mayor Coleman and Partnership for Domestic Abuse Services
Announce Site of Domestic Abuse Resource Center**

Resource center to increase safety and support for victims of domestic violence

(Saint Paul, MN) – Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, with the Partnership for Domestic Abuse Services, announced the development of a new domestic abuse resource center, to be located in City Hall and expected to open Summer 2007.

The center will bring together the critical safety and support services domestic violence victims require. Through this centrally located office, victims can receive orders for protection, culturally relevant advocacy services for themselves and their children, law enforcement and civil legal services, and consultation with prosecutors. The center will also offer a designated children's area where they can play while their parent or guardian is receiving services. Additional services, such as employment counseling, housing assistance, mental health and chemical dependency counseling will be available through a referral network to victims who access the center.

“Victims of domestic violence face a fragmented process when attempting to break their silence and end the abuse,” said Mayor Coleman. “This is about protecting and improving the lives of domestic abuse victims, and holding the perpetrators accountable. Establishing a domestic abuse resource center is an enormous step forward in our efforts to end the cycle of domestic violence.”

“This project is the kind of collaborative effort that is essential to ending violence against women in our society,” according to Cyndi Cook, executive director of the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. “By recognizing that battering is a community problem, not an individual one, Saint Paul is taking a significant step toward ultimately ending the violence that has such a dramatic impact on the lives of women and children throughout our society.”

Although very effective services for victims of domestic abuse are available in Ramsey County, many are spread throughout the region, making it difficult for victims to access them. Services

are fragmented—a victim must obtain an order of protection from one agency, legal services from another, and arrange shelter through a third. Many victims may not know about services available to them, and if they do, barriers ranging from childcare, work schedules, transportation problems, safety concerns or language barriers may prevent access. Organizing services in response to and informed by victims' voices will reduce the barriers to safety and support.

“By organizing ourselves in a single location we also hope to align our organizations—physically as well as philosophically—so that we don't inadvertently place layer upon layer of bureaucracy on victims, making their lives more trying and potentially compromising their ability to remain safe,” according to Shelley Johnson Cline, executive director of St. Paul Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

“The center is a major improvement for victims as it increases access to services, improves efficiency and empowers victims to get the services they need,” said City Council President Kathy Lantry. “I look forward to hearing more and more success stories about women and children who will be served by this center.”

“The center will be a very positive step toward providing support services to victims of domestic violence and to enhancing the public safety,” noted Susan Gaertner, Ramsey County Attorney. “The County Attorney's Office is very pleased to be working with many other partners to make this exciting initiative a reality.” John Choi, Saint Paul City Attorney, added, “Domestic abuse does not belong in Saint Paul and we are committed, in every way, to support the needs of domestic abuse victims and hold accountable those who perpetrate domestic violence in this City.”

The resource center will also help the criminal justice system hold offenders accountable for their violent actions by enhancing the connections between victim advocates and law enforcement. “In a society that bends over backwards to protect the suspects' rights and privileges, it is crucial that we, the guardians of the innocent, work together to protect the victims,” said Saint Paul Police Chief John Harrington. “This center will allow police and our partners to serve the victims and to also hold those predators accountable for their atrocities.”

Construction on the City Hall space is expected to begin in March, with an anticipated opening in the summer of 2007. There is no additional cost to the City for the space, as it is already part of the City's general budget. There will also be no additional cost to the PDAS, though there will be a construction cost for the build-out of the space. The final cost of the build-out is not yet known, as the PDAS only recently approved the site for the center, and design planning is underway.

The City and PDAS will be approaching the private sector for in-kind donations and funding associated with the build-out, as well as for the equipment needed for the center.

“The organizations and institutions involved in this partnership have a great deal of expertise and passion for this critical issue,” said Cline. “Collectively, we have the potential to create a unique, nationally recognized model that could profoundly change the way domestic abuse victims are served and protected, as well as the ways through which perpetrators are held accountable for their violence.”

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