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Opinions

Hochul proclaims October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month

State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence launches domestic violence and technology public awareness campaign, will host upcoming panel discussion with leading experts

Gov. Kathy Hochul recently proclaimed October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month and announced \$6.5 million in funding that will allow state-licensed service providers to offer survivors of domestic violence and their families with options for assistance and support, instead of relying on shelter-based services, and that will also enhance prevention programs. In addition, Hochul also highlighted a new technology safety and innovation for survivors public awareness campaign, which will be coordinated by the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) and will shine a light on technology's role in abuse.

"We have come so far since the time that my mother advocated for domestic violence survivors, but our mission to put an end to the abuse and suffering that too many have had to endure is far from over," Hochul said. "Our systems must evolve and we must continue to offer innovative solutions to meet the needs of survivors and families, wherever they are."

Administered by the state Office of Children and Family Services, the \$6.5 million will support two

initiatives:

► \$4.8 million to 79 service providers statewide to provide housing for domestic violence survivors.

► \$1.7 million to five nonprofit organizations that offer domestic violence prevention programs. Each of these programs will receive \$342,380: Retreat Inc. in East Hampton, the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, Unity House of Troy, Vera House in Syracuse and Family Justice Center of Erie County.

OPDV's new social media campaign will highlight technology's intersection with domestic violence and spread awareness on the forms of technology-assisted abuse.

The governor's team said, "While technology provides survivors with access to information, safety planning, and allows them to connect with their support systems, abusive partners use it to cause further harm to their partners."

In addition to the campaign on Twitter (@NYSOPDV), Facebook (@NYSdomesticviolence) and Instagram (@nysopdv), the agency will sponsor a panel discussion featuring representatives from Facebook, Apple, Norton LifeLock and experts in academia to discuss emerging risks related to technology-assisted abuse, as well as mobile advocacy and other innovations to help survivors.

Scheduled for Wednesday, Oct.

20, the discussion, "Balancing Technology Innovation and Safety in the Context of Gender-Based Violence," is designed for service providers, advocates and victim assistance professionals. Later this month, OPDV will also release a new publication to help survivors and advocates understand technology-assisted abuse and provide concrete tools and steps to protect privacy and safety in a digital world. The agency also launched its new website.

Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Sheila J. Poole said, "Our agency is proud to administer this federal grant money to allow providers to fund concrete needs for domestic violence survivors, giving them the resources to attain safe housing. We know that providing families with support and resources is foundational to preventing domestic violence in the first place."

Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Executive Director Kelli Owens said, "Domestic Violence Awareness Month highlights a reality that victims and survivors endure all year long and lets them know that they are not alone. Now more than ever, technology plays an important role in how victims and survivors experience abuse, and how they access domestic violence services. This October, we're increasing awareness of technol-

ogy's importance in transforming and updating service delivery to survivors statewide. We are forever thankful for Gov. Hochul's longstanding commitment and leadership on this important issue."

Office of Victim Services Director Elizabeth Cronin said, "We are so proud of the work we do at OVS to ensure that crime victims receive the support they need and to ensure that domestic violence survivors have the resources they need to find safety and thrive. I commend my state agency colleagues for their work, and Gov. Hochul for her strong leadership and advocacy on behalf of all victims and survivors of crime and their families."

New York state's domestic and sexual violence hotline is available 27/7: 800-942-6906 (call), 844-997-2121 (text) or @opdv.ny.gov (chat). Last year, the state and local hotlines received 252,535 calls for assistance.

The Office of Victim Services also funds a network of more than 212 community-based programs that provide direct services to victims of crime and their families. The programs also help any victim of crime apply for compensation and other assistance from the agency, which is a safety net for individuals who have no other resources.

Morinello: Domestic violence a pandemic in itself

GUEST EDITORIAL BY ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELO MORINELLO

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Domestic violence affects millions of women and men, and it does not discriminate. Prior to the pandemic, up to one in three women and one in four men experienced some form of domestic violence by their partners. As we sheltered at home during the COVID-19 pandemic and infection rates declined, a new pandemic emerged from the shadows. Surveys around the world have shown domestic abuse spiking since January of 2020 - jumping markedly year over year compared to the same period in 2019. This is appalling.

As a father and grandfather, my heart breaks imagining the struggles and hardships victims of domestic violence deal with every

day. Throughout my 14 years as a city court judge - 10 of which I was assigned to oversee the domestic violence court - I presided over thousands of domestic violence cases.

Domestic violence can take many forms; it is not limited to physical contact or one's spouse. Fear, intimidation, financial dependency, job security, coercion and manipulation are all different, but have one thing in common: That is the abuse of power and control over a weaker victim.

This has been exacerbated during the pandemic, as abusers and their victims were often stuck together. Isolation has always been one of the most powerful weapons in the abuser's arsenal. At first, the attention can seem endearing, even caring, with abusers burrowing themselves deeper into the victim's daily life. Only later does a

much darker side come to light.

Throughout my tenure in the Assembly, I have sponsored impactful legislation that supports victims of domestic violence. I supported Helen's Law, which requires the registration of violent felony offenders (A.3471); legislation that provides a harsher penalty for intentionally committing an act of domestic violence in the presence of a child who is 15 years of age or younger (A.5751); and protects a parent who is a victim of domestic violence from having children removed from their custody if they reported the abuse (A.4754). Additionally, my Assembly colleagues and I held a series of task force forums across New York state to address domestic violence and discuss meaningful legislation to assist victims.

On Saturday, Oct. 16, I encourage everyone to wear purple to

show your solidarity with victims of domestic violence and to generate attention toward domestic violence. It is important for those experiencing domestic violence to know they are not alone.

There are a number of resources available to help you or a loved one you know is struggling. Please call the New York State Coalition against Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-942-6906 or visit www.nyscadv.org. You may also visit the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence website at https://opdv.ny.gov/survivors-victims for 24/7 confidential support and additional information.

Morinello represents the 145th Assembly District, which consists of parts of Erie and Niagara counties. For more information, visit his official website.

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