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SUBJECT: Duluth Announces New Collective Domestic Violence Policy

BY: Daniel Fanning, Communications & Policy Director - Mayor's Office

Duluth Announces New Collective Domestic Violence Policy

DULUTH, MN— Earlier today, the City of Duluth and six criminal justice agencies announced the adoption of a new collective domestic violence policy. The *Blueprint for Safety* strengthens the city's Duluth Model coordinated community response to domestic violence cases.

The City of Duluth was selected in 2011 as one of three national sites for the *Blueprint for Safety Adaptation Demonstration Initiative*, a project of the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, in partnership with Praxis International, a national training organization with offices in Duluth and St. Paul. (Other sites are New Orleans, LA, and Shelby County/Memphis, TN). Duluth is the second of the three demonstration sites to adapt the successful *St. Paul Blueprint for Safety*, developed in Minnesota in 2010.

The criminal justice system has the ultimate obligation to keep communities safe, yet its sheer size and complicated structure can prevent domestic violence cases from being handled as effectively as they could be. The *Blueprint for Safety* changes this; it is a fully articulated plan for the coordination of the justice system response to domestic violence offenses, enhancing its capacity to stop violence, reduce harm and save lives.

The *Blueprint* sets a clear foundation for this work through the use of *Six Principles for Effective Intervention*, grounded in research, and focused on improving responses to victims. It provides a template of concrete best practice policies and procedures that can be used by any community hoping to link its criminal justice agencies together in a coherent, philosophically sound domestic violence intervention model. The *Blueprint*:

- Improves how information is shared between agencies in the criminal justice system - from 911 operators to the police to prosecuting attorneys to the courts
- Ensures risk is assessed and responded to at every step
- Encourages collaboration to prevent unintended negative impacts on survivors and their communities

The *Blueprint* was built upon and influenced by the pioneering work in Duluth to create a coordinate community response model that has been replicated nationally and internationally – and by 30-plus years of communities across this nation working to shift practices in the criminal justice system to better protect women who experience battering – a unique form of violence

against women characterized by ongoing coercion, control, and violence.

Even in a community like Duluth, with a long-standing coordinated response, the Blueprint for Safety can strengthen domestic violence intervention practices. The Duluth Blueprint put into one collective policy the effective practices that were created here over the years, but it also enhanced intervention practices:

911 – St. Louis County Emergency Communications

- Keeping the caller on the line when it's safe to do so.
 - Checking when possible to see if there have been previous calls involving the same parties or address.
- Treating each domestic assault call as a priority one call.
 - Reinforcing that 911 is available when a caller needs it, regardless of how many times he/she has called.

Law Enforcement – Duluth Police Department

- House a Domestic Violence Response Team made up of investigators, probation agents and advocates.
- First police department in the country to have policy that addresses juveniles who commit acts of violence against a parent or caregiver.
- Additional risk questions that focus on intimidation and stalking.
- Increased emphasis on locating and apprehending suspects gone on arrival.

Jail, Warrants and Court Security – St. Louis County Sheriff's Office

- First in the country to add an organized response to witness intimidation into court security policy.
- Victims can call the jail and have their phone numbers blocked so inmates can't contact them.
- Domestic warrants are a high priority and if a tip is received as to a suspect's whereabouts, the Sheriff's Office will attempt to locate and execute that warrant.

Prosecution – Duluth City Attorney's Office

- Conduct risk analysis to improve arraignment and sentencing recommendations for high risk offenders.
- Include a model policy for responding to victims who fight back in relationships where they are battered.
- Work with courthouse security to charge and prosecute cases in which witnesses have been intimidated.

Prosecution – St. Louis County Attorney’s Office

- A specialized unit that is dedicated to the prosecution of domestic violence offenders.
- Use of expert witnesses to help juries understand victims of battering.
- Ongoing training with law enforcement and prosecutors on the best practices involving investigating and prosecuting domestic violence cases.

Victim Services – St. Louis County Attorney’s Office

- Have developed a strong relationship with community advocacy agencies around domestic assault cases.
- Prioritize contact with victims of domestic assault after an arrest.
- Work with victims through the court process and support the needs they identify.

Pretrial and Probation – Arrowhead Regional Corrections, Duluth Office

- Have a specialized unit to supervise domestic violence offenders and ensure court conditions are adhered to.
- Intensive supervision of high risk, domestic violence offenders by conducting random field checks for compliance to court conditions that include sobriety checks.
- Improved contact and relationships with victims.

Speakers participating in today’s launch event included Bea Hanson, Principal Deputy Director of the Office on Violence Against Women, U. S. Department of Justice; Chief Gordon Ramsay, Duluth Police Department; Daniel Fanning, Communications and Policy Director – Office of Duluth Mayor Don Ness; Mark Ruben, St. Louis County Attorney; Mary Asmus, Assistant City Attorney; Undersheriff, David Phillips, St. Louis County Sheriff’s Office; Kathy Lionberger, Unit Supervisor, Arrowhead Regional Corrections; Melissa Scaia, Executive Director of DAIP; and Scott Miller, Blueprint for Safety Co-coordinator, Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs.

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