

For immediate release:
December 28, 2005

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Governor's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board Column:

Ending domestic violence a challenge for us all

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius and Robert T. Stephan, Chair of the Governor's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board:

Stopping domestic violence is a cause close to both our hearts because we both know victims of this insidious crime. In Bob's case it was his mom who was a victim; in Kathleen's case she worked one-on-one to help countless women who had been abused.

Domestic violence affects men and women, young and old, often with fatal results. In the past five years, 121 Kansans died as a result of domestic violence – 82 of these victims were women, 39 were men and their ages ranged from 18 to 90.

In an effort to prevent more families from suffering the tragic loss of their loved ones to domestic-violence, Governor Sebelius formed the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board, made up of law enforcement officials, prosecutors, a district court judge, a private attorney, a university professor, a district coroner, a mental health provider, a parole officer and victims advocates, to find ways to prevent future fatalities.

The board has released its first report, which is available at www.ksgovernor.org/grants/policies/docs/2005_FRB_Report.pdf.

The members of the board recommend Kansas take a number of steps to reduce the number of fatalities, starting with increasing public awareness of the physical, mental and social cost of domestic violence.

The board also believes we must ensure third-time domestic violence offenders spend time in state prison, and that domestic violence incidents are taken into greater account when courts are considering custody issues.

These and eight other recommendations can be found in the full report, but the Fatality Review Board is already taking action to increase public awareness through a campaign funded by the Kansas Health Foundation.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has recognized the health crisis in families because of domestic violence. It is a community problem and it is only through a coordinated community response that the number of domestic violence-related fatalities and injuries can be reduced or prevented. We must also hold offenders of these crimes accountable while also providing for victim safety.

Everyone has a role in preventing violence in homes and protecting families, by taking action in addressing domestic violence we can have healthy children, healthy parents and thriving and healthy communities.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault or know someone who is, you can call 1-888-END ABUSE (1-888-363-2287) to find resources to assist.

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