



MEDIA RELEASE

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Recognizing and Preventing Domestic Violence

The holiday season although joyous can also be taxing to many individuals and families. The current economic crisis: jobs lost, homes foreclosed and families worried about simply making ends meet increases the stress. Add in "holiday cheer" (the over-indulgence of alcoholic beverages) and a heightened irritability and we have a powder keg ready to ignite an already strained family unit.

The St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office is happy to report a decrease in domestic violence related calls for service. The Sheriff's Office contributes the decrease to the collaborative initiatives and continued effort of law enforcement, advocacy groups, and the Family Violence Council. But even one call is one call too many.

It is important for families to recognize and/or predict the challenges in the coming weeks ahead, and prepare an action plan to keep everyone safe. Individuals experiencing stress do not have to wait for an explosive situation to reach out for help. There are a number of resources within St. Mary's County and southern Maryland where families can turn to for help. Below is a list of agencies and an idea of the services they may provide:

Walden Sierra has a 24 hour hotline, 301-863-6661, where individuals can talk with a crisis counselor and arrange emergency shelter.

During normal business hours the individuals can contact the Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy, 301-373-4141, for help in obtaining a Protective Order. The Southern Maryland Family Advocacy Center will be available 24 hours after January 3, 2010. Advocates at the center will help the victim complete the necessary paperwork and provide moral support during court hearings.

Another resource is the Community Mediation Center of St. Mary's County, 301-475-9118. The Community Mediation Center brings individuals together in a safe, confidential setting to talk about their differences and concerns.

Catholic Charities - Angel's Watch Shelter – provides emergency shelter for women and children. Their phone number is 301-934-2582.

Fleet and Family Services – provides crisis intervention, Counseling and Family Services for Military Families. The telephone number for Fleet and Family Services is 301-342-4911

The organization "A Better Life" is available to assist victims of domestic violence and stalking. A Better Life can be reached at 240-298-5716.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland provides free legal assistance to victims at 410-534-8800.

The Three Oaks Shelter provides emergency shelter for men, women and children. The telephone number for Three Oaks Shelter is 301-863-9535.

Leah's House provides emergency shelter for women and children, 301-994-9580.

Those who believe they need of assistance but are unsure of exactly which agency to contact may begin by calling the Department of Social Services at 240-895-7000. Social Services are available to assist or to make a referral to the agency which best suits the individual's needs.

Deputy First Class Sarah Russell, the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Domestic Violence Officer is also available to assist. Deputy First Class Russell's telephone number is 301-475-4200 ext. 1955.

Please reach out as necessary and have a safe holiday season.