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**NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**AG Schimel Expands Homicide Prevention through Domestic Violence  
Intervention with End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin**

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Brad Schimel today announced that End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (End Abuse) will expand the Lethality Assessment Program, an evidence-based program that identifies victims of domestic violence who are at high risk for experiencing lethal violence. Through federal grant funding, the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) will provide End Abuse more than \$500,000 to expand this program between July 2018 and June 2020.

“This program has been so successful already, it was an easy choice to invest \$500,000 over the next two years to help get this important program into more Wisconsin communities,” said Attorney General Schimel. “As a prosecutor for 29 years, I have seen how domestic violence can be lethal for not just involved victims, but for the first responders and surrounding community. The safety and health of families and communities is too critical; providing this proven tool is a tremendous step forward.”

The Lethality Assessment Program was first developed in Maryland, and provides law enforcement an evidence-based lethality assessment instrument to identify victims of domestic violence who are at high risk of being seriously injured or killed by their intimate partner. The program immediately connects the victim to local community-based domestic violence services and helps first responders identify possibly lethal circumstances. The assessment tool is vital for first responders; research shows that for 28% to 33% of victims, the homicide or attempted homicide is the first act of violence, meaning that observing non-physical tactics by an abuser is critical.

“Research shows that only about 4% of abused women had accessed a domestic violence hotline or shelter in the year prior to being killed by an intimate partner,

illustrating that those who are perhaps at the greatest risk of homicide are not reaching out for help on their own,” said Patti Seger, Executive Director of End Abuse. “That’s why the lethality assessment program is so valuable. It capitalizes on that point of contact with law enforcement and gets victims connected with support and assistance immediately, before they begin to second guess their decision to call law enforcement.”

Since July 2017, DOJ has provided End Abuse with \$115,000 in grant funding from the U.S. DOJ Office on Violence Against Women to educate and train law enforcement and victim service providers to prevent and reduce domestic violence-related homicides. Wisconsin DOJ will assist End Abuse in expanding the program further by increasing grant funding to \$509,000 from July 2018 to June 2020.

“The Lethality Assessment Program is a simple, evidence based tool for law enforcement to use,” said Menomonie Police Chief Erick Atkinson. “It can dramatically reduce the likelihood of a person becoming the victim of homicide by an intimate partner, and it strengthens the bonds between law enforcement and the community.” Chief Atkinson is a member of the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence National Advisory Board.

To date, 93 law enforcement agencies and 17 victim service organizations in 20 Wisconsin counties have been trained to use the lethality assessment screening while responding to domestic violence incidents, including every residential law enforcement agency in Milwaukee County. With this funding expansion, lethality assessment program trainings are already scheduled for law enforcement and victim service providers in St. Croix and Iowa counties. The training is available at no cost to participant organizations.

In addition to funding more trainings, this expansion will fund a homicide prevention specialist at End Abuse, provide resources for further data analysis on domestic violence and related homicides to determine further policy development, and allow End Abuse to integrate other evidence-based homicide prevention strategies into communities.

The lethality assessment program has been found to be highly effective. In one study<sup>1</sup>, the lethality assessment tool correctly identified 92% of women who experience near-fatal violence. Victim participants also experienced less frequent and less severe violence than victims in the comparison group and engaged in protective actions more often.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/247456.pdf>

Wisconsin DOJ supports many programs to support victims of domestic violence. In 2017, DOJ provided nearly \$2.5 million in grant funding, through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) STOP grant, to support prosecutors, advocates, victim/witness services, and law enforcement who are providing services to domestic and sexual violence victims in Wisconsin. Through this grant funding, DOJ supports five regional Violence Against Women resource prosecutors in Brown, Dane, Eau Claire, Milwaukee, and Waukesha counties. These prosecutors provide training and technical assistance to prosecutors around the state who handle domestic violence and sexual assault cases.

Also, supported through grant funding, DOJ trains law enforcement on the best practices for responding to and investigating domestic violence; provides VAWA funding to the Director of State Courts Office to train judges on domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking; and routinely provides information and trainings to advocates and victim/witness services. DOJ has created an online version of these training materials for overnight and weekend domestic violence shelter staff. DOJ is also working with the American Indians Against Abuse to support tribal domestic violence programs and is developing a tribal law enforcement training program.