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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITIES RISE NEARLY 19 PERCENT IN 2002

Harrisburg (October 1) – The number of Pennsylvania homicides that involved domestic violence increased nearly 19 percent in 2002, and the death rate so far this year is equally and alarmingly high.

“2002 was a particularly lethal year. Victims of domestic violence were toddlers and they were grandmothers. They were murdered as they slept in their beds and as they fled for their lives,” said Susan Kelly-Dreiss, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). “They were shot, strangled, stabbed, suffocated, beaten, bludgeoned, burned, poisoned and mutilated.”

PCADV released its 2002 Domestic Violence Homicide Report at a press conference at the state capitol this morning to commemorate National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The report is compiled through newspaper stories; there is no central collection system for domestic violence-related crimes in Pennsylvania.

Kelly-Dreiss said that 126 Pennsylvanians lost their lives in intimate partner or family violence last year. On average, one person was killed every three days.

Highlights of the 2002 Homicide Report include:

- Who died
 - 76 women
 - 36 men
 - 14 children

- The perpetrators
 - 96 men
 - 14 women

In 2001, there were 106 victims. In the first eight months of 2003, at least 78 victims were killed in domestic violence crimes.

One reason for the increase last year could be the high number of crimes that involved multiple victims. Another contributing factor could be the poor economy.

“While domestic violence transcends all social, economic, racial, ethnic and sexual orientation barriers, we know from research that one of the risk factors for family violence is unemployment or poverty,” Kelly-Dreiss said.

PCADV is convening a statewide fatality review team to study Pennsylvania domestic violence fatalities. The team will consist of experts from professions that intervene with victims: advocates, law enforcement, criminal justice, social service agencies and health care professionals.

The board’s goal is to prevent domestic violence deaths by better understanding what events took place in the lives of the victim and offender prior to the murder. From those findings, PCADV will look at ways to increase protections for victims, better train professionals who come into contact with victims and batterers, and determine needed policy and legislative changes.

Kelly-Dreiss called on Governor Ed Rendell and the Legislature to restore domestic violence funding that was cut from the proposed 2003-2004 budget, particularly \$2 million for civil legal representation, which was completely eliminated. The civil legal representation program provided legal services to victims involved in complex custody, support and protection from abuse cases.

“As a result of state and federal cuts, domestic violence programs across the state are being forced to lay off staff and reduce outreach and prevention efforts,” she said. “The doors to our shelters and counseling programs will always remain open for families in immediate crisis, but when we lose funding, we lose opportunities to intervene in the lives of some of our most desperate and vulnerable citizens.”

To view the entire homicide report online, go to www.pcadv.org and click on “media room”.

PCADV is asking the media to please publish/air the national toll-free domestic violence hotline phone number, 1-800-799-SAFE, where victims of domestic violence can obtain confidential, free help and be referred to a local program. The TTY number is 1-800-787-3224.