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ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN CALLS FOR GREATER AWARENESS OF STALKING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Technology Plays Key Role in Growing Campus Stalking Incidents

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today hosted an in-depth discussion to draw attention to the prevalence of stalking on college campuses across the country and the increased role technology is playing in stalking crimes.

The Attorney General's "Campus Safety and Cyber Dangers: Stalking on College Campuses in the Digital Age," was presented at DePaul University's College of Law as part of National Stalking Awareness Month. Lt. Governor Sheila Simon, a long time advocate for victims of domestic violence, also greeted the attendees, which included members of the law enforcement and legal communities; college security, administrators and students; and victim advocates of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

More than 3 million people are stalked each year, with stalking being a particular concern on college campuses.

"College campuses provide an ideal environment for stalkers because it is so easy to track a college student's movements," said Attorney General Madigan. "Class schedules, meal plans, set practice times, and study groups make for predictable daily routines. Add to that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter where personal information is easily accessible, and students can become prime stalking targets."

While campus stalking is a growing problem, Attorney General Madigan reported that many college students are NOT reporting these crimes to authorities. More than 83 percent of stalking incidents were NOT reported to police or campus law enforcement in part because victims don't think the police will take stalking seriously. And in many cases, the victims themselves are not aware that the stalking incident is a crime.

Lt. Governor Sheila Simon is a former prosecutor and law professor, who helped found the Southern Illinois University domestic violence clinic that serves campus stalking victims. She thanked the Attorney General for her advocacy and pledged to work together to increase awareness and prosecution of these crimes. "Illinois laws provide more protection to a wider range of victims than do the laws of many other states," Simon said. "However, there is more work to be done, particularly as technology changes the way people interact."

Today's forum is part of continued efforts to raise awareness of stalking especially on college campuses. It is vital to get information to students who may be stalking victims or have friends who are victims, to prevent potential offenders from engaging in this unlawful behavior and to provide tools to campus law enforcement on how to prevent this crime and enforce the law.

Michelle Garcia, director, Stalking Resource Center at the National Center for Victims of Crime in Washington, D.C., was the keynote speaker and provided tools to the audience for recognizing and responding to stalking on college campuses. Garcia, the former president of the state and the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault has 20 years experience working with victims as well as conducting training internationally on stalking, sexual assault, domestic and dating violence.

Unlike other crimes, stalking is not a single, easily identifiable incident but a series of acts directed against a victim. Even when victims know there is a danger, it can be difficult for law enforcement to recognize, investigate, prosecute and convict stalkers.

Attorney General Madigan initiated changes that last year strengthened Illinois' stalking and cyberstalking laws to better protect victims of stalking crimes. The law now takes into consideration the way stalkers use technology – such as computers, global positioning systems, or hidden cameras – to track victims. The changes also broadened the definition of stalking to criminalize

behaviors that clearly cause victims fear or emotional distress and recognize that not all stalking behaviors involve threats of bodily harm.

It also established a procedure for victims to obtain a "Stalking No-Contact Order." The former law only allowed orders of protection when an established relationship existed between victims and their stalkers, but statistics show that victims don't always know their stalkers. Since the Stalking No Contact Order went into effect January 1, 2010, a total of 1,839 Stalking No Contact Orders have been entered by Illinois courts. In addition, the Attorney General's office trained law enforcement about the techniques used by cyberstalkers and the new tools the law now provides to investigate those crimes.

"Stalking is a crime that leaves its victims not only feeling fearful but also powerless. These victims need our support and every tool we can provide to protect them and their families," Madigan said.

Being Smart and Safe Online

Social networking sites are a fact of life, but networking with your friends shouldn't involve providing personal information to strangers. You should not post openly online:

- Your full name
- Home telephone or cell phone number
- Street address
- Hometown/city of residence
- Name of school
- Date of birth
- Credit card numbers
- Images that identify you, your school, or your hometown.

-30-

[Return to January 2011 Press Releases](#)

