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MADIGAN, WINNEBAGO COUNTY AUTHORITIES CONDUCT TWO-DAY OPERATION TO PROTECT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

Attorney General Leads Sweep, Executing Orders of Protection Against Abusers During Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Rockford — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced results of a joint operation with Rockford and Winnebago County law enforcement as part of her “Serve to Protect” initiative to ensure protections for survivors of domestic violence. Over two days last week, investigators from Madigan’s office and local and county law enforcement authorities cleared more than 50 orders of protection against domestic violence perpetrators in Winnebago County.

In recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Madigan spoke in Rockford with authorities from the Winnebago County State’s Attorney’s and Sheriff’s Offices and the Rockford Police Department about their collective efforts to reduce the number of unserved orders of protection in Winnebago County. These court orders are among the strongest protections afforded to domestic violence survivors, but if they go unserved on the offender, they offer no legal protection.

“Domestic violence is a devastating crime with serious consequences. I am committed to ensuring that every survivor who takes the courageous step of seeking help from the court receives full protection of the law,” said Attorney General Madigan.

The Attorney General’s “Serve to Protect” initiative aims to reduce the number of unserved orders throughout the state. There are currently more than 27,000 active orders of protection, but 4,500—or 17 percent—of those orders are unserved. In other words, the orders have no legal standing.

In Winnebago County on Oct. 19-20, Attorney General investigators worked in conjunction with “Operation Clean Sweep” agencies to target 107 unserved orders of protection. Of those orders, investigators served 34 orders on offenders who had been avoiding service and cleared an additional 23 cases that did not need service due to offenders being served in open court or deaths of offenders. Investigations into the remaining unserved orders are ongoing. Investigators also made three arrests on outstanding warrants during the course of the initiative.

Orders of protection usually restrict the defendant’s ability to contact or communicate with his domestic violence victim. After a court issues an order of protection, law enforcement officers must serve the order on the abuser. Once an order of protection has been served, law enforcement can arrest an abuser if he violates any of the order’s terms. But if an order of protection is not served on the abuser, it does not take effect and, thus, leaves law enforcement unable to arrest an abuser when he violates the order.

“Protecting domestic violence victims is a priority. Collaborative measures produce results,” said Winnebago County State’s Attorney Joe Bruscato. “I applaud the results of this operation, and I also personally applaud Attorney General Madigan and her leadership.”

“Operation Serve to Protect is part of an ongoing commitment by my office to protect domestic violence survivors throughout Winnebago County,” said Winnebago County Sheriff Richard Meyers. “I am proud to stand with Attorney General Madigan today to bring the issue of domestic violence and the prevention of these crimes in our county to the forefront.”

Domestic violence is a serious but often concealed threat in communities in Illinois and across the country, Madigan said today. Over their lifetimes, one in four women will be abused by their partner, and every day nationwide, four women die at the hands of their abusers.

"We're grateful for the assistance of the Attorney General and the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office in improving service of orders of protection," said Karen Gill, vice president of operations for Rockford's Remedies Renewing Lives. "Each order of protection served increases the likelihood of victims' safety."

Today's initiative is the latest effort Attorney General Madigan has undertaken to improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence and to bring this often hidden crime out from behind closed doors. Her office has held dozens of training sessions on Illinois' domestic violence laws, teaching authorities and advocates the signs of domestic violence, and secured funding for local prosecutors to increase the prosecution rates of domestic violence crimes. Madigan has also championed the rights of crime victims, giving voices to domestic violence survivors and ensuring they have the support and protection they deserve.

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