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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH BEGINS

Elected Officials Honor Activists, Officers Who Combat Abuse

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, Council President Eric Garcetti and Councilmember Jack Weiss joined representatives of the Domestic Violence Task Force to commend the efforts of the city's innovative Domestic Abuse Response Teams and to highlight the programs that the city has to prevent and intervene in domestic abuse situations.

"Domestic Violence Awareness Month gives us the opportunity to reiterate that domestic violence is a crime, to warn abusers that their actions will not be tolerated, and to offer victims our assurance that we will continue to support them," said Mayor Villaraigosa. "I strongly believe that the City of Los Angeles must take proactive, meaningful measures to stop not only the violence on our streets, but the violence in our homes as well."

"To tolerate family violence in our community is to allow the seeds of violence to be sown into the next generation," said Delgadillo. "DART interventions are essential to our prosecution efforts, and they lay the groundwork to enable victims to permanently leave a violent home. Each response is a new opportunity to stem the tide of domestic violence."

"The darkness that falls over a victim of domestic violence can feel like a suffocation that will never end," said Garcetti. "By supporting and expanding our DART system, we can break up that darkness with light. We can physically save lives. We can reach people who might think they are beyond help."

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“Our DART program shows that domestic violence is a top public safety priority, and that together, we can fight it,” said Weiss, who chairs the Public Safety Committee.

“Many in our society view domestic violence as affecting a very isolated segment of the population – women who are set apart and characterized as needy, or dependent upon the social welfare system to get by,” said Carol Tantau, chair of the city’s Domestic Violence Task Force. “This is simply not true. It affects our workplace, our neighborhoods, and our medical services. It is certainly a factor in gang violence, homelessness, poverty, mental health, and substance abuse issues.”

At the ceremony, the Dr. Marjorie Braude Award was presented to Gail Pincus and Bernita Walker, founders of DART.

“DART is not a program, it is a passion,” said Pincus. “It is a concept of helping the victim all the way through the process and being available to advocate with and for the victim whenever the victim asks for assistance.”

“Our dream was for a Coordinated Community Response where the victims of domestic violence would have full support, from the beginning of an incident to the point of complete recovery,” said Walker. “The work of the DART unit is very vital in that recovery process.”

Led by Council President Garcetti, the Los Angeles City Council approved the establishment of a Citywide Domestic Violence Abuse Response Team (DART) Program. Last year’s expansion brought the number of teams up to nine, and it continues as funds are located. DART teams provide the ultimate community policing partnership, with programs in various parts of the City, that pair specially trained domestic violence advocates with police officers to deliver a coordinated response to domestic violence. After the intervention, the teams work with the City Attorney’s office to prosecute perpetrators.

DART advocates intervene when victims are most in need, usually when bruises are fresh, perhaps not yet fully showing, and link victims with shelters, medical attention, legal assistance, counseling and other related services. An advocate’s timely and sensitive intervention greatly increases a victim’s ability to permanently leave a violent home. DART teams free uniformed officers to return to the field more quickly and significantly reduce repeat calls to domestic violence homes, which is like putting extra officers on the street.

DART advocates also provide important emotional support to victim witnesses, resulting in an increase in the number of investigations and arrests for cases involving domestic violence, rape, stalking and elder abuse. Most DART programs also provide law enforcement personnel with training on domestic violence response and investigation techniques.

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