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Georgia Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Groups Urge Lawmakers to Strengthen Family Violence Laws and Protect Victims

ATLANTA, GA – February 8, 2017 – Hundreds gathered at the Georgia State Capitol today to urge legislators to support a proposal by the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) which mirrors an existing federal law making it a felony crime for domestic violence perpetrators to possess a firearm or ammunition. GCADV's proposal specifies that a felony penalty will be imposed if the perpetrator is subject to a Family Violence Temporary Protective Order or is convicted of a qualifying family violence-related misdemeanor.

"Every neighboring state in the Southeast, including Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida, has enacted similar legislation," said Allison Smith-Burk, GCADV's Director of Public Policy.

GCADV's firearms proposal was the focus of today's Stop Violence Against Women Day, an annual advocacy event which draws attention to the issue of domestic violence and sexual assault in Georgia. Georgia currently ranks 8th in the nation for the rate at which women are killed by men. In the years between 2010 and 2015, 529 Georgians were killed by firearm in domestic violence incidents.

Stop Violence Against Women Day is a collaborative event hosted by GCADV, Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV), Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault (GNESA), Raksha, Caminar Latino, and Men Stopping Violence (MSV). "Stop Violence Against Women Day is important to both domestic violence survivors and the programs that serve them. This is an opportunity for individuals across the state to engage with their legislators, to advocate for necessary changes to our laws to improve victim safety, and to share the critical, life-saving work domestic violence programs do with their constituents," said Jennifer Thomas, Executive Director of GCFV.

According to the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), from October 2015 through September 2015, Georgia's 46 state-certified domestic violence programs answered nearly 53,400 crisis calls and provided shelter to 5,390 survivors and their children. During that same period, Georgia's 22 state-funded sexual assault programs answered approximately 11,370 crisis calls and served 4,694 victims of rape and sexual assault, including 2,089 child victims.

"Organizations such as GCADV and GNESA give voice to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Our priority is to ensure their well-being, safety, and access to justice. The firearms proposal GCADV has put forward is in response to this charge," said Jan Christiansen, GCADV Executive Director. "When roughly 70% of domestic violence related homicides in Georgia each year are committed using firearms, we must act."

Christiansen also urges victims of domestic violence to contact Georgia's 24-hour statewide domestic violence hotline at 1-800-334-2836 to talk to an advocate at one of Georgia's 46 state-certified domestic violence programs about how they can plan for their safety and to learn about services in their community.

Stop Violence Against Women Day is supported by Mary Kay Inc., which also provides funding to organizations in Georgia and throughout the country that work to end violence against women. "In Georgia, The Mary Kay Foundation has donated more than one million dollars to women's shelters providing direct services for survivors of domestic violence" said Crayton Webb, Vice President of Corporate Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility for Mary Kay Inc. "Mary Kay is committed to being the corporate leader in the effort to prevent and end violence against women once and for all."

To find a domestic violence program near you, call Georgia's 24-Hour Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline - 1.800.33.HAVEN (1.800.334.2836) (Voice/TTY)

To find a sexual assault center near you, visit www.gnesa.org or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline - 1.800.656.HOPE (1.800.656.4673)

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