

Iowa Attorney General's Office-Attorney Tom Miller
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault
News Conference

January 7, 2009

10:00 a.m.

Iowa State Capitol-Room 116

Good morning. I am Mary Ingham, Executive Director of Crisis Intervention Service. CIS is a domestic violence/sexual assault program providing services in an eight county area in North Central Iowa. I have been with the program since 1989 and have witnessed remarkable progress in victim services throughout the years. I am here today to explain the typical work provided by programs like ours, throughout the state.

The first thing most people think of is shelter and that is a huge part of what we do. Imagine going home tonight and planning for 20 houseguests, ranging in ages from 85 to a newborn. In addition to meeting basic needs of food, clothing, linens, toiletries and a warm, safe bed...you provide crisis counseling, legal advocacy, housing information, financial planning, comfort a frightened child....answer a call from a person that was just raped by her best friends boyfriend....and then deal with a clogged sink. You have imagined just another day in a shelter. Shelters provide so much more than just a roof over your head. Shelters are a basic, life saving option for victims. Shelters offer the final safety net, when all other resources have failed....when the system has failed. Despite the importance of shelter, less than 10% of our clients utilize our shelter.

We have offices located in 6 of our 8 counties. This allows us to be available to most victims with 30-45 minutes from their home. We work closely with local law enforcement, prosecutors, service providers and community members to make sure that we are offering a coordinated community response for victims. We provide essential safety planning, assist with emergency protection orders and provide counseling & advocacy. This early intervention reduces the need for shelter and increases victim safety. In an ideal situation, we can help with safety planning and with a protection order, the victim can remain in the home and the bad chap must leave.

Despite the existence of 6 offices, access to services is still a challenge to many victims. Most of rural Iowa lacks public transportation. Most of our outreach offices are staffed with one person. Our advocates are talented and resourceful, but can only be in one place at a time. For example, if an advocate is assisting a victim with an application for a temporary protection order, the process could easily take 3-4 hours. In that time, other victims need to wait for assistance or travel to another office located in the neighboring county.

In addition to our crisis services, we have one full-time staff person devoted to providing prevention & education programming throughout our 8 county service area. Our program utilizes evidence-based, age appropriate curriculum on topics ranging from bullying and child abuse to acquaintance rape, dating violence and elder abuse.

Our program, like other programs across the state, operates on a shoestring. Our request is simple...help us maintain. Any decrease in funding will have an immediate impact on our ability to provide services to victims of abuse. Cuts in funding will result in some shelters closing their doors, programs reducing services, eliminating prevention programming, cutting specialized services to children....all basic core services that every Iowan in every community should have access to if needed.

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault programs provide essential community services...the equivalent to law enforcement, fire protection and medical services. No one wants to call 911 or a rape crisis line.....but if you need to, it is essential that there is a qualified, trained professional available to respond in a timely fashion. Iowans would not tolerate waiting an hour for the fire department to respond if their house was on fire. Iowans would not tolerate waiting an hour for law enforcement to respond if they are being robbed. Iowans should not tolerate making a rape victim wait an hour for an advocate to respond to the emergency room. Iowans should not tolerate making a victim of domestic violence wait an hour for transportation to shelter.

Victims of sexual assault and domestic violence deserve the best that we can offer them. Victims need safety & options. Iowa can not afford to take this away from the most vulnerable of our population.