

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR ACTING DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CATHERINE PIERCE AT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AWARENESS MONTH EVENT**

Washington, DC

Attorney General Holder, Deputy Attorney General Ogden, Associate Attorney General Perrelli, colleagues, and distinguished guests. On behalf of the Office on Violence Against Women I thank everyone for being here today and for your extraordinary work on behalf of survivors of domestic violence.

You represent a diverse group of partners who have made a critical difference in the way state, tribal and local communities think about and respond to domestic violence and we are so very grateful to you.

Attorney General Holder, your leadership has brought a renewed sense of purpose and optimism to our work. You have inspired us and are constantly reminding us that if our communities and schools are to be safe, our homes must be safe. And you have challenged all of us who work for the Department of Justice to find innovative solutions to address violence against women and you have asked us to enter into new and different partnerships to end domestic and sexual violence.

You have been a champion of this cause for many years, inside and outside of the Department, and many women and children have survived because you have been their staunchest supporter.

Deputy Attorney General Ogden and Associate Attorney General Perrelli, you have challenged us to raise the bar by increasing public awareness and supporting programs that create a lasting shift in the way our country perceives and responds to violence against women and girls and to violence against children.

It is our goal – and our sincere hope – that through our collective efforts over the course of the next five years, we will stimulate change and a national conversation that leaves the majority of Americans with a clear understanding that violence against women and girls is unacceptable in our homes, schools, and communities – including our Indian Reservations and Alaska Native Villages.

This Department of Justice is taking every opportunity to raise awareness, both about the tragic prevalence of violence against women, as well as awareness about the important work that is being done to combat domestic and sexual violence.

Whether during the tribal listening tour, at national conferences, or during site visits to local grantees, the leadership of the Department is present with a strong message: ending violence against women is and continues to be a priority for the Department of Justice.

As you have already heard, domestic violence, rape, and child abuse know no boundaries. These crimes pervade every corner of the globe and cross every ethnic, racial, and socio-economic divide.

Very likely, all of us know at least one person who is a survivor and perhaps someone whose life was transformed by the courage of a survivor.

Thirty years ago, when a law enforcement officer responded to domestic abuse, it was considered a “family matter.” Spousal rape was not a crime. Many states did not have domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, or hotlines.

It took another 15 years to enact the Violence Against Women Act, but since then countless lives have been saved, the voices of survivors have been heard, and families have been protected. But there is still much more to be done.

We know that intimate partner violence is at the root of so many other crimes. Spousal rape. Child abuse and incest. And tragically, homicide.

Too many women lose their lives to domestic homicide and that is why we have displayed Silent Witness silhouettes in the hall of flags here at the Department throughout the week. Each silhouette tells the story of a woman who lost her life to intimate partner violence.

The stories of the Silent Witnesses serve as a reminder of what is left undone. They remind and encourage us to promote “peace, healing, and responsibility” in healthy relationships so we can end the cycle of violence in our families once and for all.

Together, let us work to save lives so that five years from now we are gathered here to tell different stories – new stories that represent the hope and change we so desire.

For our part, the Office on Violence Against Women will continue to support coordinated community responses to domestic violence in rural and urban areas alike. We will renew and strengthen our relationship with law enforcement, prosecution, and the judiciary. We will continue to support the work of advocates locally and nationally. We will continue to enhance our response to women in later life and to women with disabilities. We will strengthen our response to communities of color, to the Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bi-sexual, and Queer (LGTBQ) communities, and to the Deaf. We will continue to support civil legal assistance to victims, including battered women struggling to maintain custody of their children. And we will continue to support transitional housing and supervised visitation programs.

We will also work harder to engage men – like the extraordinary men who share the stage today – because violence against women is not just a women’s issue. It is a public safety issue that affects every one of us.

And we will try to stem intimate partner violence by working with teens and intervening with children who have witnessed or experienced violence in their homes.

But today, I call upon everyone in this room to become an agent of change so that together we can create a better world, a safer world for our grandmothers, mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.

How do we do that? We talk about the problem. We talk to our children, our families, our friends, and our colleagues. We speak up and we act when we hear or witness abuse. We start a national conversation that is a difficult and complex one. And we start talking about what is possible. We talk about a brighter and more hopeful future for our country where women and girls are considered sacred.

And with us today, we have five agents of change who are here to share their stories about the impact of the Violence Against Women Act and what is possible [intros presenters.]