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U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

October is national Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and is an appropriate time to discuss what the U.S. Department of Justice and this office are doing to address this important issue. As I have observed before, we have a particular mission to protect the most powerless among us. Few need our help more than the victims of domestic violence.

Research indicates that domestic violence crimes often go unreported to law enforcement. Statistical studies show, however, that about one fourth of American women will experience domestic violence sometime during their lives. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 2,000 women and men were killed in 2007 by intimate partners. Domestic violence impacts not only the direct victims of violence, but the children who witness it.

While the problem of domestic violence is serious and widespread, there are some positive signs. Since the 1990s, rates of domestic violence appear to be declining. One reason may be the increasing involvement of the U.S. Department of Justice. Although traditionally a concern of local law enforcement, the federal role in combating domestic violence has steadily increased since 1994, when Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act. Today the U.S. Department of Justice is more active than ever. I recently appointed an experienced prosecutor, Jill Thomas, as the new Violence Against Women Act coordinator in this office. We have increased prosecutions of firearms possession by persons with a domestic violence misdemeanor conviction, or subject to a domestic violence restraining order – two of the federal criminal laws enacted during the 1990s. We are also working with state and local law enforcement agencies -- generally the first responders in domestic violence cases -- to increase federal prosecutions of certain domestic violence and stalking crimes that involve interstate travel or Indian land. Our efforts to increase public safety on Tribal lands, where rates of domestic violence have historically been high, includes a focus on domestic violence prevention and prosecution.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) is distributing hundreds of millions of dollars to agencies with track records of combating domestic violence. This office announced grants earlier this month totaling over \$2.3 million to agencies located in this district, including the Majaree Mason Center in Fresno, which has been providing services to domestic violence victims for more than 30 years, and to Tulare County to operate a collaborative program to prevent, investigate and prosecute domestic violence. Find information about OVW, its grants, and its other activities at <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/index.html>.

This year, as part of an initiative commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act, senior Department of Justice officials visited colleges and schools throughout the country to talk about preventing and reporting domestic violence crimes. Much is being done to address this problem, but there is much more to do.