

## **Halting family violence a priority**

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October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time when we ask Arizonans to devote extra thought, time and effort to our ongoing battle against violence and abuse in our state's families and intimate relationships.

It truly is "our" battle. The damage caused by domestic violence is not limited to the victims themselves. It affects us all, from grieving relatives to frustrated co-workers and employers to terrified children who carry the scars long after the abuse has ended.

Domestic violence affects people of all ages, locations, income groups and ethnicities. It ranks among the most common violence-related 911 calls to police and sheriff's departments throughout Arizona. It sends thousands of victims to hospitals, costs millions in lost productivity and is a significant contributor to homelessness.

It is for all these reasons that I have made the fight against domestic violence a priority. Working through the Commission To Prevent Violence Against Women and with the collaboration of other elected officials, state agencies and community organizations, I am proud to say that domestic-violence shelter services are now available for every county in Arizona for the first time. In total, more than 1,000 emergency shelter beds are available at 37 shelters throughout the state.

We have also been able to identify and pursue the goals of our "2004 State Plan on Domestic and Sexual Violence."

One of those goals is achieved today with the release of the report "System Alert: Arizona's Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence." This research, sponsored by the Governor's Office Division for Women, was conducted by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University in an effort to better understand the challenges that domestic violence poses for our front-line criminal-justice professionals, and to listen more closely to the voices of victims themselves.

I urge you to read this research and heed its call for an expanded public discussion of how best to reduce and prevent domestic violence.

This month is also a time to recognize the strides Arizona has made in its fight against domestic violence; to remember the victims and to express our gratitude to the many advocates, law-enforcement officers and others who have worked so hard to make our state a safer place.

We can be proud of our accomplishments. However, as "System Alert" notes, those on the front lines warn that there is much more to do to. Let us join together to get it done.