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FOR IMMEDIATE

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275 Activists Gather to Encourage Legislation That Would Provide Economic Independence for Victims of Domestic Violence

(Albany, NY) – Over 275 activists from across the state gathered today at the Legislative Office Building to promote economic independence for victims of domestic violence. The annual Legislative Awareness Day organized by the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, was themed “Economic Independence: A Stimulus for Safety”.

The advocates called on Senate and Assembly Leadership to support economic independence for survivors of domestic violence. They asked that legislators pass legislation that will ensure survivors have access to unpaid leaves of absence, are provided protection from employment and housing discrimination, and can obtain divorces from their abusers without undue cost or delay and be treated fairly regarding maintenance and equitable distribution of property.

“There are many potential facets of power and control in a domestic violence. One of the lesser known is economic control,” said Jessica Vasquez, Chief Executive Officer of the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “Economic independence is indispensable to safety. Survivors can only realize that independence if the ordinary pathways for doing so neither discriminate against them nor inhibit their efforts. Currently, there are too many roadblocks for victims of domestic violence.”

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Assemblymember Amy Paulin said in regards to her sponsorship of the Anti-discrimination Employment Bill, S.1166/A.755, "My legislation will make it unlawful for employers to discriminate against victims of domestic violence in hiring or employment practices, helping to ensure victims' safety and economic viability. It is not unusual for a victim of domestic violence to need time away from work to confer with an attorney or domestic violence counselor, appear in Court, seek medical attention, arrange for alternative housing or recuperate from injuries. This proposal will prevent employers from terminating or demoting victims because they need time off or flexible hours as a protective measure."

"For many victims of domestic violence and stalking, their employment situation is their only stable environment," said Senator Craig M. Johnson, sponsor of S.958-A. "My measure will ensure that these victims will be able to hold onto this stability and independence as they work to rebuild their lives. It will also give us one more tool in the fight to combat domestic violence in our communities."

Assemblymember Helene Weinstein, sponsor of The Divorce Reform Act, A. 2580, said "In nearly three decades of working on behalf of victims of domestic violence and their children, I believe that while considering reform of New York State's divorce laws, it is important to address economic inequities in the current law that create barriers for women from leaving their abusive relationships. It is also important to facilitate access to representation in these matters by providing for counsel fees for non-monied spouses. This is particularly important in these most difficult economic times where service providers are seeing a dramatic increase in calls for services from domestic violence survivors."

Every person deserves and needs to feel a real sense of independence, whether financial, or safety in their homes,” said Assemblymember Susan John, sponsor of A.438. “That is especially true for victims of domestic violence. My legislation allows for victims of domestic violence to regain control of their lives without the loss of employment and is a small step to gaining economic and safety independence. I look forward to working with Senator Johnson and NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence to ensure this important civil rights legislation becomes law.”

Maya Raghu, senior staff attorney at Legal Momentum stated, “Legal Momentum salutes the NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence for focusing much-needed attention on the economic security of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and stalking. Getting and keeping a job and safe housing is critical to enabling victims to leave a violent situation and maintain financial and personal independence. It’s an especially pressing concern in these difficult economic times.”

Ellen Schell, legal director at The Legal Project stated, “Our divorce laws often represent a legal Catch-22 for married victims. We, as a society, expect victims to “leave” abusive spouses. We hold them responsible in myriad ways if they do not take the steps we think are reasonable. A victim married to an abuser is legally tied through a bond that may be difficult or impossible to dissolve. Victims of domestic violence need safety and independence, and our current system of divorce laws does not reliably provide them with either.”

The advocates also appealed to legislators to fight the proposed budget cuts that will make it harder for survivors to seek help, pursue and attain economic stability, and receive justice. Programs advocating on behalf of survivors, who rely on a broad array of human services that will be negatively impacted and in some cases devastated by the Governor’s proposed cuts, asked the legislature to ensure that funding for domestic violence programs, integrated domestic violence

courts, civil legal services, and public assistance be protected. NYSCADV supports the Fair Share Tax Campaign, Better Choice Budget Campaign, ES2, and One New York in calling on the Governor to support progressive revenue generating measures to meet the State's budget gaps.

The morning program featured an array of speakers including: Maya Raghu, Senior Staff Attorney at Legal Momentum; Ellen Schell, Legal Director at The Legal Project; and several sponsors of NYSCADV's priority legislation: Assemblymember Helene Weinstein, Assemblymember Amy Paulin, Assemblymember Susan John, Assemblymember RoAnn Destito, Senator Craig Johnson, and Jessica F. Vasquez, Chief Executive Officer, New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

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About the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence:

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (the coalition) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt social change organization representing domestic violence programs and shelters throughout New York. The coalition is dedicated to creating a social, political, and economic environment in which violence against women no longer exists. The coalition accomplishes these goals through prevention programming, capacity building for member programs, public education, training, and technical assistance to maintain and develop the professional expertise of advocates. For more information about the coalition, visit www.nyscadv.org

Please include the statewide sexual and domestic violence hotline number(s) in any related media coverage. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, and is free and confidential. Please assist us in offering the hotline number to the many victims of domestic and sexual violence re-traumatized by media reports and to those individuals currently being victimized who may not know where to turn for help.

New York State Sexual & Domestic Violence Hotline:

English language: 1 (800) 942-6906
English language TTY: 1-800-818-0656
Spanish language 1-800-942-6908
Spanish language TTY: 1-800-780-7660