

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women  
Sample Press Release

## The Women's Center of Anytown

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### **CANDLELIGHT VIGIL HELD IN ANYTOWN PARK OBSERVES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH**

Anytown, MN—Hundreds of members of the Springfield community gathered in Anytown Park the evening of October 7 for a candlelight vigil to commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month and remember Mary Johnson of Springfield and the other victims of domestic violence in Minnesota.

Mary Johnson's mother, Katherine Davis of Springfield, spoke about the isolation of domestic violence victims. "I thought I knew my daughter so well," she said. "For years, I had no idea that her husband was abusing her. If I had known, I would have tried to find a way to help. Now I can't because Mary is gone."

Mary Johnson, 38, was strangled to death by her former husband, John Johnson, 40, in her Springfield home on June 15, 2007. John Johnson is now in custody and has been charged with second-degree intentional murder. Mary Johnson was the mother of two young children who are now living with their maternal grandmother.

State Senator Lori Jones (DFL-Springfield) also spoke at the rally. "The system failed Mary. Our systems should ensure the safety and security of women and children in our community and, tragically, they did not." She spoke about the restoration of some of the state funding cuts that the Women's Center has received since 2000. "This cut had a devastating affect on the women and children who go to the Women's Center for help. I am delighted that the Legislature worked together in a bipartisan manner to support Minnesota's battered women's programs in 2005 and 2007. But our work is not done. We need to come together as a community to ensure that more of the funding that was cut from the Women's Center is restored."

Jane Smith reminded vigil attendees that help is available in the community. She and staff members of the Women's Center of Anytown passed out brochures that described the services the center offers to abused women and children in the community, including safe housing, legal advocacy and support groups. She also encouraged community members to ensure that their families, friends and neighbors are registered to vote in November's elections and educate candidates about the importance of ending violence against women. "Reducing domestic and

sexual violence was the number one priority in 2003 of women surveyed in the United States," she said, citing a Center for the Advancement of Women survey. "Let's make sure candidates in our community know that, if elected, they must work to promote justice, provide safety, and prepare for the future for all battered women and children."

On display at the candlelight vigil were 20 adult t-shirts and 11 children's t-shirts hanging from a clothesline. The t-shirts represent the number of women and children in Minnesota murdered in 2006 as a result of domestic violence. After sundown, the vigil participants lit candles in memory of Mary Johnson and all the woman and children in Minnesota who tragically died as a result of domestic violence.

"We won't forget you, Mary. We won't forget the way you lived and we won't forget the way you died," said her mother.

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