

# Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

## Legislature and Governor Affirm: Minnesota Can Afford Safety for Women and Children

Lonna Stevens, Public Policy and Legislative Coordinator

While the Legislature was forced to go into special session to complete their work, the close of the 2005 Minnesota Legislative Session held a few positive notes for Minnesota's battered women and children. We are pleased to report that each of MCBW's legislative priorities was included in the Public Safety Omnibus Bill, which was signed into law by Governor Pawlenty on June 2, 2005.



**Sen. Jane Ranum prepares to sign the Public Safety Omnibus Bill on the Capitol steps. To her left are Rep. Steve Smith, Rep. Judy Soderstrom, and Governor Tim Pawlenty. To her right is Rep. Mary Murphy.**

These included:

1. Funding for crime victim services that restores the amount cut through the redistribution of funds in the Office of Justice Programs judicial district funding process last year. This funding totals \$1.270 million for fiscal years 06-07 and \$1.270 million for 08-09 for victim services. (The conference committee chose to adopt the amounts in the Senate's version of the Public Safety Omnibus bill for battered women's, abused children's, sexual assault, and general crime ser-

vices.)

2. Battered women's shelter and safe home funding appropriations were adopted at \$400,000 for fiscal years 06-07 and \$400,000 for 08-09. This is far less than we had hoped for, given the funding crisis many of Minnesota's shelters are facing, but a victory nonetheless for this difficult and contentious budget session.
3. In the State of Minnesota it will now be a felony to strangle a family or household member, punishable by up to 3 years of imprisonment.

It was a high priority for MCBW to work closely with many stakeholders to accomplish our shared legislative goals this session. In order to make headway for crime victim services and shelter funding, there needed to be a uniform effort that would convey the importance of restoring crucial funding to allow programs and shelters to continue to do their work. MCBW partnered with the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Domestic Violence Legislative Alliance, and ISALAH, a faith-based social justice organizing group, to advocate for crime victim services and shelter funding. Also, the Minnesota General Crime Victim Coalition headed up an effective "Day On the Hill" that we attended in February 2005. In March 2005 the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition, and the Minnesota Network for Abuse in Later Life joined MCBW in organizing their memberships to meet with their legislators at the 2005 Violence Against Women Action Day (see *article on page 4*).

The bill to enhance criminal penalties for domestic assault by strangulation was also a collaborative effort. MCBW worked closely with the Minnesota County Attorney's Association on this bill and sought key testimony that was provided by

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## Director's Update: Everyday Heroes

Cyndi Cook, Executive Director

The last few months have held more than their share of tragedy and heartbreak for Minnesotans. From the tragic loss of life at Red Lake to an admired police officer being shot down in a dark alley, there has been, as is all too often the case, too much violence and too much pain. So many across the state have found themselves struggling to heal from these very public events and from the pain that occurs behind closed doors.

It is at these times that we also have an opportunity to see and learn about the best in people, to really recognize what often goes unnoticed. The word "hero" gets tossed around lightly at times, yet everyday heroes walk among us. It is during these times of struggle that we can learn the most from their actions.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize just a few of those true heroes. They aren't the star athletes or movie idols who so often get called by that name without earning the title. Instead, these heroes are the ones who find the courage to keep trying.

A definition of hero: A hero is an advocate who climbs up a trellis on the side of a house to help a battered woman escape her abuser. A hero is a teacher who stands with her students in strength and love. Heroes are community elders who come together to bring healing at a time of need to make sure no one grieves alone. Heroes are advocates and State employees who drop everything to staff a shelter hundreds of miles away, so that the shelter's own advocates may have respite after a community tragedy. A hero is a police officer who treats prostituted women with the respect they deserve, and truly cares for those who

are too often brushed aside. A hero is a legislator who deeply understands the real meaning of the term "public servant," and who goes back to the Capitol each year to fight for all of us in a world that does everything it can to block her way.

Heroes carry pagers 24 hours a day to make sure there is always someone there when a victim of battering or sexual assault calls for help. A hero is a young woman who found her voice and made change by testifying about her abuse at the Legislature to create new law to help battered women all over the state. A hero is a woman whose abusive husband stole the most precious thing in her world away from her by murdering her child, but who finds the courage to not only get up each morning, but to dedicate her life to that child by telling her story to all who will listen.

Heroes are all of these things. They are the larger than life people who we hear about on the front page, and they are also our neighbors, our friends, our mothers, and our sisters. They do the things that no one thinks can be done. They act from their truest selves and keep going even when things are most difficult. Heroes bring a smile to the face of someone who needs very much to smile and they are there with a hug and a strong shoulder when someone needs to let the tears come. And every day, they continue to show the way for all of us to be our best selves.

# Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

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## It's Time to Organize to Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act

For many of us working to end domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence, VAWA is a familiar term. However, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) may be something that is unfamiliar to our friends and neighbors. Although we all benefit from VAWA, many of us receive those benefits unknowingly.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was initially passed into federal law in 1994 and **will expire in September 2005, unless we encourage Congress to reauthorize it.** VAWA has:

- Created the National Domestic Violence Hotline and legal assistance;
- Increased trainings for police, prosecutors, and court officials;
- Established new federal crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking to fill in jurisdictional gaps in prosecuting these crimes;
- Recognized the authority of Indian nations to respond to violence against Indian women;
- Established federal guarantees for Full Faith & Credit (enforcement and recognition of protection orders across state and jurisdictional lines);
- Provided protection for battered immigrants: established U- and T-visas, and focused on trafficking of persons.

In fiscal year 2004, \$1,373,080 of VAWA state formula STOP grant funding went to Minnesota programs and services for battered women and their children. Just a few examples of VAWA projects funded to address the needs of battered women and enhance system response to domestic violence in Minnesota are:

- **Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth:** A comprehensive review of the criminal justice and civil court response to battered women.
- **Breaking Free in St. Paul:** A transitional housing program for women of color escaping prostitution.
- **The Women's Rural Advocacy Program in Southwest Minnesota:** The purchase and implementation of digital cameras and printers for improved prosecution of domestic violence cases.
- **Migrant Health Services in Crookston:** Expansion of domestic violence and sexual assault services to Hispanic migrant farm workers in the Red River Valley.
- **Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services in**

**St. Paul:** Legal advocacy services to young Native American women in collaboration with the Ain Dah Yung Center.

In addition to the lives saved by improved responses to violence against women, VAWA has also proven to have economic savings. The original 1994 VAWA saved nearly \$14.8 billion in net averted social costs.

**VAWA reauthorization includes existing and improved measures to provide safety in our homes and communities, such as innovative ideas to provide safe housing, increased access to public benefits, increased funding for culturally specific programs, strengthened ability for American Indian nations to end domestic and sexual violence, and programs to ensure safe workplaces.**

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women has joined hundreds of allied partners to support the Reauthorization of VAWA in 2005. We believe that everyone has the right to be safe in their homes and communities and that VAWA reauthorization is crucial to this safety. We understand that violence happens to both men and women, but we also know that specific considerations and services must be focused on the 95% of domestic violence homicide victims who are killed at the hands of their male partners and the 1 out of every 4 women who will be assaulted by an intimate partner in her lifetime. **We stand in support of VAWA reauthorization to end domestic violence, stalking, sexual violence, and dating violence, and to create a country where everyone feels safe in their homes and communities.**

Over the next months, we will be asking you to join us in our efforts by taking some simple action steps to support the reauthorization of VAWA. Together, we will make it clear to Congress that ending violence against women is a priority for our country.

MCBW will hold an audioconference discussion for our member programs on **Thursday, June 23rd from 2-3:30 p.m.** on organizing for the reauthorization of VAWA. Registration information is available on the MCBW web site at [www.mcbw.org](http://www.mcbw.org).

For more information on VAWA reauthorization, including fact sheets, go to MCBW's VAWA web page at [www.mcbw.org/vawa.htm](http://www.mcbw.org/vawa.htm).

## The 2005 Violence Against Women Action Day: Let's Find a Balance

Danielle Kluz, Communications Coordinator

Advocates, survivors, and supporters gathered from all over Minnesota on March 2nd for the 2005 Violence Against Women Action Day Rally at the Capitol. Co-sponsored by the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition, and the Minnesota Network on Abuse in Later Life, the theme of this year's action day was *Minnesota CAN Afford Safety for Women and Children: Let's Find a Balance*.



Prior to the rally at the Capitol, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women's Executive Director, Cyndi Cook, said, "We're at the Capitol to let legislators and the general public know that we need to find a balance by holding perpetrators accountable, keeping doors open for women and children, and preventing domestic violence and sexual assault before it starts."

The night before the rally, over 90 members of the 4 coalitions came to MCBW's new office for a training on the 2005 session's policy initiatives and legislative organizing. Participants engaged in a unique exercise, adapted from Camp Sheila Wellstone, where they worked in groups to develop their messaging for legislators and then actually lobbied MCBW/MNCASA/MIWSAC/Sheila Wellstone Institute staff posing as legislators. "This was a fantastic way of getting real-time experience in talking to legislators about our issues," said Becci Leonard of the Women's Rural Advocacy Program in Granite Falls. "It really helped raise our comfort level the next day when we actually visited our representatives and senators at the Capitol."

On the morning of March 2nd, members visited their local legislators to discuss policy items such as

the MCBW-supported bills to make domestic strangulation a felony and the restoration of funding for crime victim service programs and battered women's shelters. Violence Intervention Project, a shelter in Thief River Falls, had the novel idea of holding a group meeting with their legislators in a conference room at the State Office Building, rather than holding a multitude of individual meetings.

Before the rally, a press conference was held in the Capitol Rotunda. Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner spoke about the need to hold perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence accountable for their actions. Lenore Barsness, Executive Director of Northwoods Coalition for Battered Women in Bemidji and Vice-Chair of the MCBW Board of Directors, discussed recapturing State of Minnesota funding for battered women's and sexual assault programs. Rosanne St. Sauver, an advocate at Houston County Women's Resources and a member of the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault Board, spoke out about the importance of prevention efforts to stop domestic violence and sexual assault before they start.



**Roses are laid on a table in the Capitol Rotunda during the Violence Against Women Action Day memorial for the women and children murdered as a result of domestic violence and child abuse.**

After the press conference, people began streaming into the Capitol Rotunda for the Violence Against Women Action Day. "This is, by far, the largest crowd I've seen at Action Day in years," said Lonna Stevens, MCBW's Public Policy and Legislative Coordinator. "It speaks to how important these issues are for Minnesotans everywhere." Members came from as far away as Roseau, in the very northwest of Minnesota, and Hokah in the

## Violence Against Women Action Day

*Continued from Page 4*

southeast.

Someplace Safe, a battered women's shelter in Fergus Falls (with programs in 7 other counties), rented a bus; more than 50 advocates, survivors, community members, and high school students came to the rally, all wearing purple t-shirts to demonstrate their



**Students from Minnewaska Area High School in Glenwood, part of the Someplace Safe contingent, pose at the Capitol.**

commitment to ending domestic violence. Before the rally, the group met with their local legislators.

"Coming to the Capitol for Violence Against Women Action Day rally was empowering for the high school students," said Diane Kittleson of Someplace Safe in Glenwood. "A few days before the trip, a local judge told them they had an impact on what goes on at the Legislature, and that November 7, 2006 was an important day for them because they'd be old enough to vote in those elections. So, the students made a sign that said November 7, 2006 on it. They wanted to remind legislators that their voices would be heard in 2006 and that ending violence against women was a major priority for them."

The Violence Against Women Action Day rally was emceed by MCBW's Lonna Stevens. At the rally, legislators spoke to express their support in ending violence against women and children, including Sen. Jane Ranum and Rep. Steve Smith, chief authors of MCBW-sponsored bills to make domestic strangulation more easily chargeable as a felony, and Sen. Carrie Ruud also expressed her support for ending violence against women. Rep. Matt Entenza movingly spoke about growing up with abuse in his family.

Rally speakers also included MN Coalition Against Sexual Assault Executive Director Carla Ferrucci, Roseann St. Sauver, Char Thompsom of the Minnesota Network on Abuse in Later Life, and Nicole Matthews, Executive Director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition, who introduced a group of extraordinary girls working to end sexual violence. One of the girls, Ariel Diver, 15, of the White Earth Reservation, talked about the need to involve young Native people in ending violence against women. Alyson Olson, a survivor of domestic strangulation, spoke out in favor of the strengthened legislation and support for battered women.



**The Someplace Safe group discusses the needs of battered women in their community with Rep. Bud Heidgerken.**

The rally closed with a memorial to the women and children murdered in the previous year as a result of domestic violence. As the names of the victims were read out loud, advocates and supporters brought up a rose for each of the woman victims, and a stuffed animal for each of the child victims to lay on a table. A moment of silence honored the lives and spirits lost to us all.

After the rally, participants marched the 3 blocks from the Capitol to the MCBW office for a reception and the debut display of the 2004 Clothesline Project, t-shirts specially decorated to remember each of the 13 women and 9 children murdered as a result domestic violence. The 2004 Clothesline Project is now traveling the state of Minnesota to raise awareness of domestic violence.

## Legislative Update

Continued from page 1

representatives of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office, the Minneapolis Police Department, the Battered Women's Justice Project, and most importantly, Alyson Olson, a survivor who courageously shared her story. We were grateful for the support of the Hennepin Fatality Review Team and for the timely release of their 2004 report, *One Life Lost as a Result of Domestic Violence is One too Many*, which recommended greater consequences for domestic violence perpetrators who strangle their victims in the course of an assault. (For a copy of the report go to [www.mcbw.org/pdf/dvfatalityreport2004.pdf](http://www.mcbw.org/pdf/dvfatalityreport2004.pdf).)

MCBW and our members owe a debt of gratitude to the Senate and House Public Safety Conference Committee Chairs, Sen. Jane Ranum and Rep. Steve Smith. Sen. Ranum continues to be a true champion for battered women and their children; much of the success of this year's legislative efforts are due to her hard work and dedication. Rep. Smith promised that the felony enhancement for domestic assault by strangulation would pass and he delivered. We thank **all of you** who took the time to call, write, e-mail, and visit your legislators; those of you who encouraged your communities to do the same; and everyone who participated in the 2005 Violence Against Women Action Day at the Capitol. We can and do make a difference for battered women and their children!

As we will not know the outcome of Health and Human services legislation such as child care, health care, and MFIP, that is still under consideration, MCBW will prepare a special edition newsletter at the end of the special session on new laws affecting battered women and their children. This edition will also provide an overview of numerous changes that address sex offender accountability and methamphetamine crimes. We will also provide an in-depth analysis of child support legislation that passed in the regular session. Preliminary comparisons between the new "income shares" model and current levels of child support show a significant decrease in support for parents with sole custody and we are concerned about the impact of this on battered women and their children.

The following are just a few highlights of legislation that passed in the regular session:

- A new law prohibits employer retaliation against victims who must take time off from work to obtain an Order for Protection or a Harassment Re-

straining Order, as well as victims or witnesses who must take time off for other criminal proceedings, and spouses/next of kin who take time off work to attend criminal proceedings of heinous crimes.

- In response to an appeal case, the Domestic Abuse Act (518B.01) was amended to clarify that safety is the primary consideration of the court when awarding custody and parenting time in an OFP hearing.
- The definition for first-degree murder charges was expanded, including causing the death of a minor while committing child abuse, when the perpetrator has engaged in a past pattern of child abuse upon a child; and causing the death while committing domestic abuse, when the perpetrator has engaged in past pattern of domestic abuse upon the victim or another family or household member.
- In order to clarify the authority of the court, the definition of domestic abuse no contact orders was expanded to include any domestic abuse, harassment, or stalking committed against a family or household member; violation of an OFP; or violation of a prior domestic abuse no contact order.
- The Minnesota Department of Human Services had announced that it would no longer collect spousal maintenance if there was no child support obligation being enforced as well, which would have put a number of battered women at risk. A new law compels the department to continue to provide income withholding services to spousal maintenance-only cases at the request of one of the parties.
- The Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women led a successful effort to address human trafficking in Minnesota. This new law defines human, labor, and sex trafficking; expands the definition of promoting prostitution; enhances and creates new criminal penalties and new civil and corporate liability provisions for labor and sex trafficking; and provides for the distribution of proceeds from forfeitures resulting from prostitution and trafficking offenses. The Department of Public Safety will receive \$50,000 each year for 2006-2007 to conduct a study and assessment and compile and analyze data on trafficking in Minnesota.

## Thank You to Our AMAZING Donors

Thank you to the wonderful people, organizations, and businesses that donated to the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women from December 1, 2004 to the present. Your cash and in-kind donations are very much appreciated by us.

For more information on tax-deductible donations to the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, please call Kim Graham at (651) 646-6177. Please contact us if we failed to acknowledge you or your gift!

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## Farewell to Delia Ruiz and Diana Patterson

With great difficulty we said goodbye in March to Delia Ruiz, who had served as MCBW's Finance and Administration Coordinator since October 2001. In order to focus more resources on the demanding program needs of MCBW, the Finance and Administration Coordinator position was eliminated to allow for the creation of a program manager position. Unfortunately, that meant that MCBW would lose Delia's financial expertise and passion for ending violence against women and children.

Delia made important contributions to MCBW's financial success over the last three years and had an integral role in developing financial policies and procedures for the agency. But Delia wasn't just a wonderful staff member—she was a listening ear, the office "mother," a great joke-teller, and always seemed to bring *arroz con gandules* (rice

with pigeon peas) on the days when the rest of the staff forgot to bring lunch. We all miss her very much, but luckily she isn't far away. She is now the Finance/Grants Manager for Clare Housing, a St. Paul organization that provides housing for people living with HIV and AIDS.

We also had to say goodbye to Diana Patterson, who had served on MCBW's Board since October 2004. Diana worked at Mayo Clinic Social Services and was a tireless advocate for battered women. She is relocating to Washington State and plans to spend spring and early summer traveling around the United States with her dog. We thank Diana for all she did for MCBW and wish her the best of luck on her new adventure.

# Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

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## Congratulations to Bernice Sisson!

MCBW would like to congratulate **Bernice Sisson**, who is a founding mother of Minnesota's battered women's movement, and currently an advocate at the St. Paul Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, as well as a founder of the Minnesota Network on Abuse in Later Life. Bernice was honored in June by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Office of Justice Programs at their Annual Conference on Crime Victims with the **Distinguished Service Award** for her many years of work on behalf of battered women and their children.

Thank you for being an inspiration to so many in the battered women's movement, Bernice!

## Help Support Battered Women's Services in Minnesota

I want to help stop violence against women by supporting the mission of MCBW.  
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