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## **Charges are up under state's felony domestic strangulation law, but more needs to be done to curb domestic homicides, say two reports**

MINNEAPOLIS (Jan. 24, 2007) — In the wake of several high-profile domestic homicides in Minnesota last year, two organizations have jointly released reports that assess the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence cases and recommend improvements for intervening in future cases.

A report issued by WATCH, a court-monitoring organization in Hennepin County, evaluates the initial impact of the 2005 state law that makes strangulation during domestic abuse a felony offense. Strangulation is one of the most dangerous forms of domestic abuse and is frequently a precursor to domestic homicide.

At the same time, the Hennepin County Fatality Review Team released its latest progress report, reviewing the response of the county's criminal justice system and social service agencies in 11 domestic homicides since 2004. The report is considered to be a companion to the Review Team's initial 2002 report and its subsequent progress report in 2004.

The Review Team, established by statute in 2000, is a collaboration of private, public, and nonprofit organizations as well as citizen volunteers from throughout Hennepin County. The Chief Judge in Hennepin County appoints the members who represent specific agencies spelled out in the statute. WATCH played a key role in the initiation of the Review Team.

"The cumulative effect of these two reports should emphasize the serious nature of domestic violence and its corrosive effects on children, families, and communities, said Hennepin County District Judge Kathryn Quaintance, chair of the Review Team Project.

"While both our reports show we've made significant progress in addressing domestic violence since 2000, they also highlight areas where we can continue to improve," she said.

One such area was the Review Team's focus on children as victims, witnesses, and in some instances, future perpetrators of domestic violence. The report recommended immediate and ongoing intervention and treatment of these children for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In this and 10 other areas, the report identified a total of 44 'opportunities for intervention.'

Among the progress made in addressing domestic violence, the Review Team Report noted the enactment in 2005 of the state felony strangulation law. The Review Team had previously highlighted the significant lethality of strangulation during domestic abuse.

Executive Director Marna Anderson said WATCH's study of the new law showed it has had the positive effect it intended.

"It's increased awareness of how lethal domestic strangulation can be, it's enhanced safety for victims, and it's held offenders more accountable," she said. "However, much work remains to be done, and we've included recommendations to use the law to its fullest potential."

The 10 recommendations in the WATCH report address inconsistencies in charging patterns, lenient sentencing of some potentially lethal offenders, failure to address probation violations, and the need for stricter probation supervision of offenders.

For more information about WATCH or for a copy of its report, visit [www.watchmn.org](http://www.watchmn.org). For a copy of the 2006 Fatality Review Team Report, call 612-348-5067 or call Marc Kessler at 651-690-0897 for an electronic copy.

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