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Domestic Violence Programs & Law Enforcement Even More Critical Resource During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Jail Releases Must Consider Public Safety

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Especially during the Covid19 pandemic, the public needs to know that Ohio's domestic violence programs remain open for both shelter and non-shelter services. As efforts increase to reduce local jail populations amid legitimate concerns about the infection of persons held there, domestic violence advocates across the state are also calling for those arrested to still be evaluated for danger, pursuant to Ohio's bail statute.

"This really is an unprecedented situation for domestic violence survivors and our programs," explains Nancy Grigsby, Legal Program Director of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. "Survivors often use a wide range of avenues to gain information, resources and support to increase safety for them and their children. In many families, victims are now at home with their abusers and children as more and more Ohioans become unemployed or work from home." Before the Covid 19 pandemic, survivors may have found support at places of employment or worship, in community groups, through family and friends, at school, at medical and counseling appointments, and through other social contacts. They might have had hours each day away from violent partners to seek help. Grigsby continues, "The pandemic related closures of schools and businesses and limits on gatherings also limit these traditional avenues for safety. So it is especially important that victims can rely upon law enforcement and domestic violence programs to respond effectively."

While the Ohio Domestic Violence Network appreciates the ethical dilemma of holding people in jails where they may be exposed to Covid19, it reminds the public that other avenues for victim safety are constrained by this pandemic. "It is critical that persons arrested for domestic violence and related offenses are evaluated for danger pursuant to our bail statute and that conditions of bond are imposed to increase safety," stresses Grigsby. Ohio Revised Code 2919.251, requires judges to evaluate several factors related to danger in the setting of bail for people charged with domestic violence. These include a history of strangulation, use of weapons, infliction of serious injury and other factors shown through research to predict an escalation to more severe or lethal violence.

Never before has the important role of Ohio's domestic violence programs and local law enforcement been more key to the safety of Ohio's families. Grigsby reminds the public, "It is important for Ohioans to know that Ohio's domestic violence programs – including the Ohio Domestic Violence Network – are open and running. We stand ready to provide critical services to support the safety of survivors of their children, even as the pandemic continues in our state." Anyone in Ohio can find their local program by calling 800-934-9840, or, if they have a safe computer, by going to www.odvn.org. Grigsby concludes, "Our state faces two public health emergencies, and through effective intervention, we can better keep people safe from both Covid19 and the epidemic of family violence and related homicide."