

# Team will battle 'epidemic' of domestic violence

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By Peter Reuell/Daily News staff  
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FRAMINGHAM -

The number of domestic violence-related deaths statewide increased nearly three-fold from 2005 to 2007, a fact Middlesex County District Attorney Gerry Leone believes is "unacceptable."

"That's not a problem - it's an epidemic," Leone said yesterday, recalling a domestic violence murder he prosecuted a decade ago in Waltham. "It's entirely unacceptable that we haven't made strides in those 10 years."

Voices Against Violence's Mary Gianakis agrees, and yesterday announced the launch of a new program aimed at stopping such deaths.

Funded by a \$91,000 grant from the Executive Office of Public Safety, the agency plans to create a High-Risk Domestic Violence Case Response Team, which will help identify cases where victims of domestic violence are at risk of being attacked again or even murdered.

"Unfortunately, the number of domestic violence murders is rising at an alarming rate," Gianakis said. "Clearly, we must do something to stem this devastating trend."

Based on a similar program in Newburyport, the response team idea is to bring everyone who works with victims of domestic violence, including police, prosecutors and service providers like Voices, together to identify people most likely to reoffend and coordinate services for both the victim of domestic violence and the attacker.

The first four to six months of the yearlong grant will be spent creating the program from scratch, Gianakis said, to ensure it is tailored exactly to Framingham.

Part of that process will also include training every Framingham Police officer to look for danger signs when responding to domestic violence incidents, and developing policies and procedures for the response team.

"At the six-month point, we hope to be operational," Gianakis said, adding that the team can reapply for additional grant funding for two more years. "Then we will begin meeting and making referrals."

The response team's creation was hailed by a handful of state and local officials yesterday, including state Rep. Pam Richardson, D-Framingham, Framingham Police Chief Steven Carl and Leone.

"We have to act to affect the problem of BAD," Leone said. "Barriers. Against. Disclosure. Far too often, if we just had the ability to get into these homes ... we could (stop) these homicides. Disclosure, that's they key.

"We've come together, we've got to stay together and work together. That's the only way we'll make a significant impact on domestic violence."

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