



OAG Media Contact:
Maura Possley
312-814-3118
mpossley@atg.state.il.us

ATTORNEY GENERAL, PROSECUTORS & ADVOCATES ANNOUNCE JOINT WORKING GROUP TO COMBAT SEXUAL ASSAULT CRIME IN ILLINOIS

Madigan, Alvarez, Kelly & ICASA Joint Forces to Improve Sexual Assault Prosecution Rates

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan today, joined by Cook County State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez, St. Clair County State’s Attorney Brendan Kelly and the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, announced a new joint working group seeking to improve prosecution rates of sexual assault cases throughout Illinois.

The Sexual Assault Working Group was created to address troubling statistics that show survivors of sexual assault are not reporting these crimes to authorities in Illinois. Studies suggest that only between 5 percent and 20 percent of all rapes are reported to law enforcement.

The Working Group will seek to address challenges in the criminal justice and health care systems that discourage victims from reporting cases of sexual assault. The Sexual Assault Working Group will also focus on efforts to improve the response to sexual assault cases that are reported with the goal of improving victim safety as well as offender accountability.

“Victims do not report these crimes because they do not believe they will receive justice,” Attorney General Madigan said. “But each of us has a legal and moral obligation to take these cases seriously and to treat victims with compassion and dignity. It is only after we build a better, more responsive criminal justice system that we will begin to see more people coming forward and ensure that justice is being served.

State’s Attorney Alvarez noted that the collaboration is bringing together the most important agencies across Illinois that deal with crimes of sexual assault and advocate for victims.

“The most influential and effective agencies that combat sexual assault are going to have a seat at the table and will have a voice in this process,” Alvarez said. “We all want victims to have confidence in the criminal justice system and we are all committed to increasing our efforts to achieve this goal by increasing dialogue and promoting transparency in every step of the process.”

Members of the joint working group include the Illinois State's Attorneys Association, the Illinois Associated of Chiefs of Police, the Illinois Sheriffs Association, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the Illinois State Police, the Illinois Hospital Association, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, the Chicago Police Department, Rape Victims Advocates, The Center for the Prevention of Abuse, the Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services, and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

St. Clair County State's Attorney Brendan Kelly noted the need for consistent approaches to investigations and prosecutions of sexual assault cases throughout the state.

"The quality of sex assault investigations is very inconsistent from department to department. Justice for sex assault victims shouldn't be different for those who live in a suburban jurisdiction versus an urban or rural jurisdiction struggling for resources," said Kelly.

The Working Group will identify and seek to implement strategies such as supportive training or statutory changes that will, among other goals:

- Ensure that medical providers are trained in evidence collection;
- Increase the number of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners throughout the state;
- Improve the efficiency of evidence processing by forensic crime labs;
- Ensure survivors are not billed for sexual assault forensic exams and have access to follow-up medical care;
- Train first responders and investigators to initiate and properly conduct victim-sensitive interviews and investigations;
- Identify strategies to ensure follow-up investigations on sexual assault kits that return a DNA match;
- Establish and provide training in best practices for reviewing and charging of sexual assault cases;
- Improve communication between investigators, victims and advocates; and
- Develop protocols for communication with victims in compliance with the Crime Victims Bill of Rights.

"ICASA is excited that this collaborative effort has begun. Working with the Attorney General, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office and related allies to improve the medical and criminal justice response for sexual assault survivors is a goal whose time has arrived. Survivors will be the winners in this effort," said Polly Poskin, executive director of ICASA.

Attorney General Madigan has worked for more than a decade to protect survivors of sexual violence and strengthen their rights. In her latest effort, Madigan is working with state lawmakers to pass legislation to prohibit survivors of sexual assault from being billed for sexual assault evidence kits. Madigan is also working to pass the Preventing Sexual Violence on Campus Act, which will set standards for colleges and universities to prevent and respond to sexual violence in the face of studies that show one in five undergraduate women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape.

In previous years, Madigan has led an effort to significantly increase the number of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners in hospitals throughout Illinois. SANEs are registered nurses who are specially trained to collect physical evidence following a sexual assault and to respond to the psychological needs of a survivor, and they are also trained to testify in court. In 2010, Madigan worked to pass legislation to make Illinois the first state in the country mandate the testing of sexual assault evidence kits after a backlog of 4,000 kits was discovered. Madigan has also funded dozens of organizations during her tenure that provide critical victim services to survivors, and she has strengthened Illinois law to protect victims of stalking, a crime that is more likely to occur on college campuses that can lead to sexual violence and other crimes.

Over the last six years, crimes of violence against women have been a top priority for State's Attorney Alvarez and the practices that have been implemented by her administration will be used as a model for the working group committee that will evaluate the criminal prosecution of sex assault cases. Alvarez has worked consistently to improve training and to bolster services for victims, creating the Special Division on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence to ensure a consistent and broad-based response for these most vulnerable victims. She has also dedicated additional resources to these cases and mandated training in sexual assault for all attorneys in her office. Alvarez has also implemented the practice of supervisory review for charging on sex cases as well as designating specially trained attorneys to handle sexual assault from the victim's earliest point of interaction with the criminal justice system.