

## 1000 Stalking Safety Kits Assembled and Available for Victims

**DATE:** January 10, 2008

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Yesterday more than 30 volunteers gathered at the Department of Public Safety to sound the alarm about stalking and to assemble 1000 stalking safety kits which will be distributed across the state and made available to stalking victims.

Speaking to the crowd of volunteers, Attorney General Steve Rowe said that as a society, we haven't been clear that stalking behavior is unacceptable and dangerous. His message was simple, "Stalking is a serious crime that can and does lead to other crimes like physical assault, sexual assault and murder." Rowe continued, "If you try to manage a stalker on your own, you could be putting yourself in even greater danger." He encouraged victims to report stalking behavior to law enforcement and to reach out to other community resources for help.

Governor Baldacci has proclaimed January Stalking Awareness Month in Maine. Victim advocates from the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV) and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) organized this stalking safety kit assembly event to educate the public about the pervasive crime of stalking and to create valuable tools for victim safety.

Nicky Blanchard, MCEDV Public Awareness and Prevention Coordinator, said, "Although stalking prevalence is high in Maine, public awareness about stalking as a crime remains dangerously low. One in 12 women and one in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetime, for an average duration of almost two years. Stalking safety kits empower stalking victims with tools to help them focus on safety, document the crime and access available resources." Blanchard highlighted the 2006 Maine Crime Victimization

Survey that found that about 12% of respondents were victims of stalking behavior in the past year.

Only a few domestic violence projects and sexual assault support centers in Maine currently have a supply of stalking safety kits, which include flashlights, disposable cameras, journals and pens, cell phone programmed to 9-1-1, whistles, rubber gloves and plastic bags for evidence collection, as well as information about stalking resources. Through generous funding from the Department of Public Safety and Northern District Wal-Mart stores, sexual assault and domestic violence advocates were able to assemble 1,000 stalking safety kits and distribute them in communities throughout the state.

“As a company employing over 2,500 people in northern Maine, we see domestic violence and stalking situations every day. We need to do something to stop this and prevent people from getting hurt,” said Don Emmons, Community Involvement Coordinator, Brewer Wal-Mart. The Northern District Wal-Mart stores donated \$3,200 to help purchase materials for the stalking safety kits.

Donna Strickler, Executive Director of Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center, explained that over the last several months domestic violence and sexual assault advocates have been cross-trained to provide advocacy and support to all victims of stalking. Strickler said, “Stalking instills great fear and anxiety in victims and it is often devastating to their lives. We want victims to know that help is only a phone call away.”

MCEDV and MECASA are committed to providing support, safety planning and other resources to stalking victims regardless of their relationship to the perpetrator. Victims should be directed to call the statewide domestic violence helpline: **1.866.834.HELP** or the statewide sexual assault crisis and support line: **1.800.871.7741 (or TTY: 1-888-458-5599)** for support.

There were insufficient funds to purchase cell phones. Please ask the public to drop off their old cell phones at their local domestic violence project or sexual assault center.

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