



State Attorney

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December 13, 2017
For Immediate Release

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State Attorney Andrew Warren Is Disarming Domestic Abusers

Tampa, Florida – On December 13, 2017, State Attorney Andrew Warren announced that his office has undertaken a major initiative aimed at disarming domestic abusers. The State Attorney’s Office is taking steps to remove firearms from domestic violence offenders who, by law, are prohibited from having them. The initiative will increase the safety of the public and police officers, and assist the office in prosecuting domestic violence offenders.

State Attorney Warren said, “Domestic violence is a serious problem, and guns in the hands of domestic abusers are a deadly combination. The time has arrived to take serious action about domestic violence and guns. We can do more, we need to do more, and here in Hillsborough, we will do more. As State Attorney, I refuse to stand by while our mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends are being threatened, assaulted, and killed by domestic abusers who have forfeited their right to have a gun.”

The statistics are alarming. Nationwide, over one-half of domestic violence murders are caused by a firearm, and the presence of a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide by over 500%.¹ The state and local statistics tell an equally disturbing story -- a Floridian is killed in a domestic incident every other day, and guns were responsible for almost one-half of the domestic violence homicides in Florida between 2010 and 2016.² A Hillsborough County resident is the victim of a domestic violence offense every 79 minutes.³ In many cases, the perpetrators had a known criminal history of domestic violence. The State Attorney’s Office has and continues to work with law enforcement agencies and domestic violence organizations to reduce the number of shooting deaths at the hands of domestic violence offenders.

¹ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

² F.D.L.E. Uniform Crime Reports (“UCR”); Faces of Fatality 2017 Report - Attorney General’s Statewide (Florida) Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team.

³ UCR, 2012-2016

Pursuant to the new initiative, the State Attorney's Office will aggressively seek the relinquishment of firearms from domestic violence defendants who are prohibited by law from possessing a firearm, as well as those who have been charged with an act of domestic violence based upon a probable cause determination. The office will work with law enforcement upon responding to a domestic violence incident to conduct an initial risk assessment and inquiry pertaining to the offender's access to a firearm. Prosecutors will utilize that information and conduct a background check to determine whether the perpetrator is legally prohibited from possessing a gun. At the defendant's first appearance or bond hearing, the State Attorney's Office will seek relinquishment of any firearms as a condition of pre-trial release. The office will also seek relinquishment of any firearms and prohibit the possession of firearms, as part of plea agreements, entry into diversion programs, and probation in domestic violence cases. The perpetrator's possession of a firearm in violation of the pre-trial release conditions or probation terms can serve as the basis for additional criminal charges.

Mindy Murphy, President/CEO of The Spring, and Clara Reynolds, President/CEO of the Crisis Center, stood with the State Attorney and spoke at the press conference in support of the initiative. Also in attendance were Tiffany Bolt, Executive Director of Are You Safe, and representatives from the Florida Coalition Against Gun Violence, League of Women Voters, Sexual Violence Task Force of Tampa Bay, and Moms Demand Action Against Gun Violence.

"We commend the State Attorney for implementing this initiative," said Reynolds. She further explained, "The correlation between domestic violence, firearms, and homicide is well-documented. We're communicating with domestic violence survivors everyday through 2-1-1, and our trauma counseling and sexual assault services departments. We know that many survivors of domestic violence live in constant fear of their abuser. This measure is instrumental for both the physical safety and emotional well-being of survivors in our community."

Murphy added, "According to Everytown for Gun Safety, 54 percent of the 156 mass shootings from 2009 to 2016 were rooted in domestic or family violence. Getting guns out of the hands of batterers will keep victims and their children safer, and also will keep all of us safer. We applaud State Attorney Warren and his office for recognizing how dangerous abusers are, and for taking additional steps to hold them accountable."

"We will aggressively enforce existing laws to protect victims of abuse, and make victims feel safe enough to come forward," Warren announced. The policy has other benefits as well, including simplifying the prosecution of domestic abusers with additional potential charges for violation of bond or probation for illegal firearm possession, especially where a victim is reluctant to testify; removal of illegal firearms from the community; and alerting law enforcement to the possible presence of a firearm when responding to domestic violence incidents.

State Attorney Warren expressed, "By taking and keeping guns away from abusers, we will reduce the number of incidents of domestic violence. We will help victims overcome the overwhelming, paralyzing fear that comes with having an abusive, armed partner. And we will hopefully save lives."

A recording of the press conference can be viewed at the SAO 13th YouTube page at

<http://bit.ly/2AocwTI>.

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