



Helping victims become survivors

Iowa becomes region's latest state to adopt 'Safe at Home' confidentiality program to thwart domestic violence, stalking

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During my 2014 campaign for Iowa secretary of state, one of the top issues I ran on was implementing a Safe at Home program: an address confidentiality program for victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, trafficking and stalking.

The program is already active in 32 other states, and I felt that it was long past due for Iowa to take this important step toward helping victims become survivors. Safe at Home enables participants to become active members of society by providing a legal substitute address to use in place of their physical address. The substitute address can be used by participants for correspondence with government agencies and private organizations.

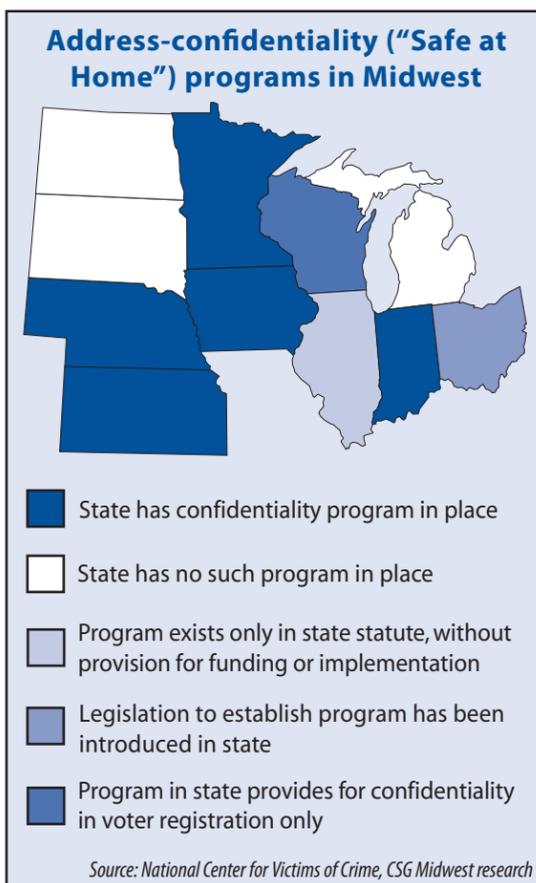
Early in the 2015 Iowa legislative session, state Rep. Dean Fisher approached me about passing the Safe at Home Act immediately. A former constituent of Dean's had been forced to leave Iowa, with her young daughter, to escape an abusive ex-husband. They moved to California, which already had an address confidentiality program in place.

This separation from the constituent's family and friends was heartbreaking on many levels. Two loving parents missed their daughter and granddaughter terribly. They missed some milestones in their granddaughter's life as she grew. Rep. Fisher was adamant that we institute Safe at Home as soon as possible so other survivors of violent crimes can have that layer of protection in Iowa.

Dean, myself and my staff quickly began lobbying legislators to support the Safe at Home Act. We also took our case on the road, conducting Safe at Home roundtable discussions in communities across Iowa. We wanted to gather input from various stakeholders, including victims' rights advocates, law enforcement and county auditors, while also promoting the program through local media.

Victims' advocates told us that one of the first things victims ask is whether there is a way for their abuser to not find out where they live. Those words inspired us even more to get this program in place.

Government is supposed to be here to help



citizens. The Safe at Home program is one way we can do that.

When the time came for the Iowa House to vote on the bill, we had little doubt the Safe at Home Act would pass. All 100 representatives voted in favor of the legislation. We were surprised by the overwhelming support. It is rare that a bill passes the Iowa House 100-0. A 99-0 or 98-0 vote happens occasionally, with a legislator or two not present or abstaining. However, in this case, all 100 representatives made it a point to be on the record supporting this important legislation.

We continued our Safe at Home roundtable discussions and media outreach across the state while waiting for the Senate to take up the bill. A few weeks later, senators passed the Safe at Home Act, 45-0. The bill was then sent to Gov. Terry Branstad's desk for approval, and he signed it into law on May 7.

Safe at Home launches on Jan. 1. Passing the bill

One of the first things victims ask about is whether there is a way to prevent their abuser from finding out where they live.

was relatively easy compared to implementing the program. There are numerous variables involved with making sure all government agencies are informed about, and in compliance, with the Safe at Home Act.

City, county and state offices — such as city clerks, county auditors, county treasurers, schools, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Human Services and other similar offices — must accept the substitute address when presented with a participation card from a program participant. Private organizations requiring a mailing address must also accept the substitute address as the participant's legal address.

Each participant in the Safe at Home program will be given a Des Moines address, no matter where they live in the state. We have added a full-time position in the Iowa secretary of state's office to work exclusively on Safe at Home.

As we prepare to launch the program, we find that we are constantly overcoming new hurdles in the process. Our fellow Midwestern states that already have Safe at Home programs have been very helpful in offering advice on how to implement this program.

Based on numbers provided by other states, we estimate around 500 Iowans will use Safe at Home by its second year.

This program has a chance to make a very real and very positive impact on Iowans' lives. It is my hope that the Iowa Legislature takes further steps to help survivors in the future.

Safe at Home is but one step, but it is a definite step in the right direction. ★

Facts on domestic violence, stalking and sexual violence in United States

- ✓ An estimated 22.3 percent of women and 14.0 percent of men have experienced at least one act of severe physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetimes.
- ✓ An estimated 15.2 percent of women have experienced stalking during their lifetimes that made them feel very fearful or believe that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed; 5.7 percent of men have been victims of stalking during their lifetimes.
- ✓ Among females, 60.8 percent were stalked by a current or former intimate partner, nearly one-quarter by an acquaintance, 16.2 percent by a stranger and 6.2 percent by a family member. Among males, 43.5 percent were stalked by an intimate partner, 31.9 percent by an acquaintance, 20.0 percent by a stranger and 9.9 percent by a family member.
- ✓ An estimated 19.3 percent of women and 1.7 percent of men have been raped during their lifetimes.
- ✓ An estimated 43.9 percent of women and 23.4 percent of men have been victims of sexual violence other than rape; the majority of victims of all types of sexual violence knew their perpetrators.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (estimates based on 2011 survey)

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate was elected in 2014 to his second term in that position. A Republican, he previously served as secretary of state from 1995-1999, state senator from 1989-1995 and mayor of Cedar Rapids from 2002-2006.

Submissions welcome

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