



## COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

# OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

J. KIRK ANDRUS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

### Stemming the Local Tide of Intimate Partner Violence

November 20, 2017  
For Immediate Release.

My family and I came to Siskiyou County in 2005 and among my first professional tasks was to prepare the office to litigate the June 18, 2002 murders of Sacha Marino and Jimmy Jackson. They were killed by Sacha's former intimate partner who is now serving life in prison. Over the years we have had many other women slain by a current or former intimate partner. I often think of their names as I am reminded of their lives or, too often, of their deaths. I am reminded of their children—each of them sentenced by the killer to grow up without their mother.

As Domestic Violence awareness month comes to an end I feel that it is important to recognize an incredibly destructive trend. A recent study in 18 states, analyzing data between 2003 and 2014, found that 55% of all murdered women were killed by intimate partners—approximately 10 times as many as men.

California is in the midst of a crime wave, and Siskiyou County is experiencing a surge in violent crime. We are now seeing far too many horrific and tragic cases. I have surveyed northern California counties and a few statistics stand out. Since January of this year, there have been 14 intimate partner homicides in Sacramento County, and 7 such homicides in El Dorado County. But what hits closest to home is that in this month of October 2017 alone—Domestic Violence awareness month—and within mere hours of each other, 2 Siskiyou County women were murdered. One, an alleged domestic violence homicide currently working its way through our local courts, took place in “north county.” The other shocked and saddened all of “south county.”

It is a tragedy that these 2 names were added to our list of innocent, local victims. These 2 women were loved and valued by many people. They were great mothers, and they deserved to continue to be great mothers and someday, grandmothers. Instead they were murdered, allegedly with handguns by the fathers of their children.

The FBI reports that approximately 3 women are killed each day in the United States by their current or former intimate partner. Taking that incredibly troubling statistic, and based upon population alone, we would statistically expect such a tragedy to take place once approximately

every 6.6 years in Siskiyou County. However, the problem here is exponentially worse by a factor of many times. There may not have been 6.6 *hours* between these two murders.

These tragedies allegedly involved 2 men with virtually no prior contact with the criminal justice system, who came from good families and had jobs. I do not highlight these cases to suggest that we as communities “missed something” or should have seen an obvious way to intervene. What I do suggest is that we owe it to these women to learn from this and to do better. Whatever form the intervention must take—and it most often would include combating mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse, and prior domestic violence—we must lengthen our stride to attack the problems. These 2 men did not stand out in any significant way from hundreds of others who grew up here and continue to live here. But we must do all that we can to see that what they *did* is never repeated again.

One of these men is now deceased, and we do not know what kind of darkness led to this act. To others dealing with their own kinds of challenges, this moment cries out for a recommitment from all of us to provide opportunities for others to unburden themselves of their problems and fears. And for those feeling hopeless and dark, there is always a way forward. Please find a way to talk about it and get help.

Without specific reference to either of this month’s deaths, I offer that the most common way for a community to intervene and prevent a future occurrence is to combat domestic violence. In most cases this is the origin of an intimate partner homicide. There is often a stigma surrounding domestic violence and such cases are very difficult to prosecute. Victims of domestic violence are often reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement and, more often, prosecutors. In many situations, the victims will recant their prior statements and testify on behalf of their abusers during court proceedings. There are myriad reasons that a victim of domestic violence may recant including fear of retaliation from the abuser, lack of trust in the criminal justice system, financial dependence on the abuser, and misplaced emotional loyalty toward the abuser. Sometimes abusers convince the victims that they are to blame for the violence. In turn, victims attempt to “fix” the problem by refusing to cooperate with prosecutors who are seeking to hold the abuser accountable for their actions. I have no doubt that our efforts in prosecuting abusers have saved lives. What is troubling, though, is that they would not have saved these two.

Public awareness of these issues is important if we are to make inroads against this growing problem. Family, friends, neighbors and co-workers of domestic violence victims should not remain silent. These vulnerable victims need support from the entire community in order to escape a violent relationship.

Domestic violence thrives behind closed doors and perpetrators escape punishment when people treat it as a ‘private issue,’ leaving victims without the help and support they need to come forward and help hold their abuser accountable. I hope that everyone will take the time to learn about how serious an issue domestic violence is in our community, and seek out ways they can

help put a stop to domestic violence. Instead of asking ‘why don’t they just leave?,’ ask what you can do to help. Leaving an abusive relationship marks a point at which a woman’s life is in greatest peril, and where she needs the most support.

In 2017 CDC developed a technical package of programs, policies and practices entitled, “Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan.” You can access this report online and read in detail about their 6 suggested strategies:

- Teach safe and healthy relationship skills
- Engage influential adults and peers
- Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence
- Create protective environments
- Strengthen economic supports for families
- Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms

We are fortunate to live in a wonderful county with tremendous, caring people and great opportunities. We can reverse this violent trend, and we have the resources to do so. It will take all of us, and we owe it to two wonderful young mothers to do what we can to make our homes safer places to live.

***Kirk Andrus***  
***Siskiyou County District Attorney***