



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY

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CONTACT: Jennifer Donnals
MEDIA LINE: 615-251-5131
615-509-3154 (MOBILE)
Jennifer.Donnals@tn.gov

Dalya Qualls
615-251-5131
615-630-2738 (MOBILE)
Dalya.J.Qualls@tn.gov

TENNESSEE MOVES FORWARD ON FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER EFFORT TO HELP COMBAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

ANNOUNCEMENT MADE ON FIRST DAY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

KNOXVILLE--- Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security Commissioner Bill Gibbons today announced significant progress in a statewide effort to help reduce incidents of domestic violence in Tennessee by increasing the number of family justice centers as a means of providing more support to victims of violence. Tennessee is the first state to prioritize federal grant funding, through its Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP), to establish a statewide family justice center initiative. The effort is a major part of Governor Haslam's Public Safety Action Plan.

Commissioner Gibbons made the announcement at a training conference at the Knoxville Family Justice Center for organizers of centers planned for Chattanooga, Cookeville, and Nashville. Gibbons was joined by OCJP Director Bill Scollon, Knox County District Attorney Randy Nichols, District Attorney Randy York of Putnam County, and the directors of the family justice centers in Knoxville and Memphis. The Office of Criminal Justice Programs and the Knoxville Family Justice Center hosted the training. Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett and Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero participated in the training earlier in the day.

"While reported domestic violence incidents in Tennessee are down more than 10 percent compared to last year, domestic violence continues to make up a large percentage of all reported violent crimes, with over 50,000 incidents already reported this year. We know that in order to reduce crime in our state, we have to reduce violence in the home. Expanding the number of family safety centers is one of the steps in the Governor's Public Safety Action Plan to get us to that goal and help make Tennessee safer," Gibbons said. Gibbons heads the Governor's Public Safety Subcabinet.

According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, through August of this year, preliminary figures show 50,370 reported domestic violence offenses compared to 56,451 through August of 2012 (10.8 percent decrease).

Family justice centers provide victims of domestic violence with a single location to access safety, advocacy, justice, and other services necessary to end the cycle of violence in the home. Using a coordinated, comprehensive approach to family violence, these types of centers bring many agencies and organizations under one roof and become "one-stop-shops" to provide help for victims and their children. The basic partners normally include law enforcement, prosecutors, civil legal service providers, and community-based advocates.

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312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE
25TH FLOOR TN TOWER
NASHVILLE, TN 37243
WWW.TENNESSEE.GOV/SAFETY

The Family Justice Center Alliance reports a significant reduction in the number of homicides in communities with family justice centers, including New York; Rockville, Md.; and San Diego. The Alliance also states that victims have felt enhanced safety, greater autonomy and empowerment, and less fear and anxiety for themselves and their children. Centers provide more efficiency and coordination among service providers, better prosecution of offenders, and increased support services to victims and their children.

The Knoxville Family Justice Center was the first such center in Tennessee, founded in 2006. The Family Safety Center in Memphis opened in 2012. The OCJP has awarded grant funding to organizers in Chattanooga, Cookeville, and Nashville to help establish family justice centers in those communities. The grants provide funding for a two-year planning process and the first year of operations for the centers.

The Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security's (www.TN.Gov/safety) mission is to ensure that our state is a safe, secure place in which to live, work and travel; enforce the law with integrity; and provide customer-focused services professionally and efficiently.

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