



## **SURVIVOR OF SEYMOUR VIOLENT CRIMES SPEAKS OUT**

*Police mishandling of her case has resulted in revictimization, "...over and over and over again"*

**MILWAUKEE, Wis. (October 2019)** --- Legal Action of Wisconsin is releasing this statement on behalf of an anonymous client of our Crime Victims' Rights Project. This project provides free legal representation to victims of crime who want help protecting their privacy and enforcing their rights in criminal cases. Crime victims should not have to choose between their privacy and their voice. Therefore, we are releasing our client's views regarding her victimization on her behalf.

Earlier this year, our client was violently attacked, raped, and strangled by her partner while he made verbal death threats to kill her if she reported him to the police. Less than 12 hours later, he killed two of her children (one 4 years, the other 3 months) and himself. Our client demands changes to Seymour Police Department policies and practices, so others do not have to go through what she has.

After being violently assaulted, our client escaped and contacted police in the late evening to report the attack and the death threats. She begged them to take action to protect her children, who were still in the home. Police tried to contact the perpetrator, by phone and in person, but made no effort to enter the home. It was not until 8am the following day that law enforcement finally entered the home where the two children and perpetrator were found dead. The medical examiner estimates time of death for all three was between 3-4am.

Our client believes that critical errors were made by police, leading to the murder of her two children. The Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) is a questionnaire that can be used by law enforcement immediately following a domestic violence incident to assess a victim's imminent risk of being killed by the perpetrator. Seymour Police Department is trained in the LAP. Unfortunately, our client's LAP was conducted hours after she was attacked, and only after an officer was prompted by the nurse working with our client. Despite her answers resulting in a high-risk assessment, police did not try to enter the home until it was too late. While trying to cope with this immense tragedy, our client discovered that police failed to seal certain reports resulting in the publication of private information, including the location of her residence, her name, and details of the crimes. Such breaches of privacy negatively impact crime victims, making the general public privy to the most painful moments of their lives. Breaches of privacy can also compromise the safety of survivors and center attention on rumors and speculation, rather than the survivor's experience.

Our client believes her initial report was mishandled by Seymour Police Department. She believes that best practices were either ignored or were inadequate. She demands that the department review their

practices and receive training in the areas of victim's rights, domestic violence, and empathy. "Had they handled the situation better, this outcome could have been prevented", our client declares.

Out of respect for the victim's privacy rights and concern for her surviving children, Legal Action asks that the press not release or rerelease personally identifying information about the victim, her family, or details of the crimes. By protecting privacy, the media can play a critical role in defending victim's rights and preventing the trauma of re-victimization.

### **About Legal Action**

Since 1968, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., a non-profit law firm, has been providing free civil legal aid to marginalized and low-income individuals and families throughout Wisconsin. Legal Action aims to deliver top-quality, personalized legal service to every client it serves. The firm also participates in legal work with a broader reach, aimed at systemic changes that will help more people achieve a decent quality of life. With offices in six cities, Legal Action serves 39 southern Wisconsin counties with 78 staff attorneys and about 50 support staff. Legal Action's work is funded by many different public and private sources, including the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, and has hundreds of active volunteer attorneys who supplement, enhance, and support our staff attorneys' case work.

###

Questions about the case and interview requests should be directed to Legal Action of Wisconsin at 414-274-3097. For information about domestic abuse and the LAP please contact Tony Wilkin Gibart, Associate Director at End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin at 608-237-3452.