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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Chester County Police Use  
Lethality Assessment Program to Combat Domestic Violence**

The headlines are terrible. MAN SHOOTS GIRLFRIEND! HUSBAND AND WIFE DEAD IN MURDER-SUICIDE! BREAK-UP LEADS TO KILLING!

Chester County law enforcement has seen too many cases where domestic violence accelerates into murder. Jamica Woods was shot and killed by her long-time boyfriend Gregory Twyman when she threw him out of the house. Kimberly Hvizda was stabbed to death by her husband James Hvizda in the midst of the couple splitting up. Jacinda Miller was killed by her estranged boyfriend Dennis Cassel in the parking lot of a YMCA, then Cassel killed himself.

In order to prevent such incidents, Chester County law enforcement works together with the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County to implement the Lethality Assessment Program ("LAP"). LAP is an interview tool that helps police predict which domestic violence cases are most likely to lead to cases of extreme violence in the future.

In the 12 month period ending on June 30, 2018, Chester County law enforcement conducted 329 LAP screenings. 28 different Chester County police departments used LAP during that time period, including the Coatesville Police Department, Southern Chester County Regional Police Department, Downingtown

Police Department, and Westtown-East Goshen Regional Police Department. The chart below details the use of LAP by Chester County law enforcement.

**Domestic Violence Center LAP Screens July 2017 - June 2018**

Police Department	High-Danger Screen	Non-High Danger Screen	Did Not Answer Screen	Spoke to Hotline	Went for Services	Total Screens
Atglen	1	0	0	1	0	1
Caln	15	7	1	9	9	23
Coatesville	39	11	7	17	11	57
Downingtown	13	13	4	10	3	30
East Brandywine	2	1	0	2	1	3
East Coventry	1	0	0	1	1	1
East Fallowfield	7	3	3	5	2	13
East Pikeland	5	3	0	3	2	8
East Whiteland	1	1	0	1	1	2
Easttown	4	2	0	3	3	6
Kennett Square	17	3	0	7	7	20
Malvern	1	2	0	1	1	3
North Coventry	12	2	0	7	5	14
Oxford	1	0	0	0	0	1
Parkesburg	2	0	0	0	0	2
South Coatesville	3	0	0	2	2	3
Southern Chester County Reg.	22	12	0	18	14	34
Spring City	2	0	0	1	0	2
Tredyffrin	5	3	0	2	1	8
Uwchlan	3	3	0	1	1	6
Valley	6	0	0	3	4	6
West Brandywine	3	0	1	0	0	4
West Caln	5	4	0	3	1	9
West Chester	5	4	0	3	3	9
West Goshen	7	5	0	2	3	12
West Whiteland	10	8	3	4	6	21
Westtown-East Goshen	19	8	3	12	6	30
Willistown	1	0	0	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>329</b>
<b>28 Participating Depts.</b>						

If police respond to a domestic violence call, in addition to the regular questions about the incident, the police use the LAP questions to seek information that is a predictor of future extreme violence. For instance, access to weapons by a defendant is one crucial inquiry. A history of suicide attempts by an abuser correlates with later violence. Choking or strangling conduct by the defendant, because it is both physically and psychologically damaging for the victim, is part of the LAP screen that indicates high-risk for future deadly violence.

If a domestic violence victim is rated as “high risk” or “high danger” under LAP, they are informed of the classification and advised to consult with the

Domestic Violence Center of Chester County (“DVCCC”). DVCCC can provide emergency shelter for the victim and often follows up by requesting a protection from abuse (“PFA”) order from a court, keeping the abuser away from the victim.

Dolly Wideman-Scott, the CEO of DVCCC, stated, “LAP is an important tool in protecting victims of domestic violence. Combined with the other services offered by DVCCC, it helps to break the cycle of domestic violence by letting the victim know the real-life danger that can result, including the victim’s death. That knowledge often serves as a wake-up call for the victim.”

The Downingtown Police Department used the LAP screen 30 times during the past year. Downingtown Police Chief Howard Holland said, “Law enforcement has learned to treat every domestic violence case seriously. In addition, LAP lets the police know which cases require extra resources and attention. This information helps us to protect the victims, and may prevent a police officer from walking into an ambush.”

Chester County has been using LAP for five years, adding more police departments at every opportunity. Chester County has one of the highest percentage of police departments using LAP in the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

“The bottom line is that LAP saves lives,” added Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan. “Every domestic violence murder haunts the surviving family members, the community, and all of Chester County. We are proud that Chester County law enforcement leads the way in protecting victims of domestic violence and preventing these incidents from happening. That is smart policing.”

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Approved for release:

Thomas P. Hogan