Domestic Violence Group Touts Budget Funding

Victim advocates on Tuesday cheered the latest state budget's inclusion of funding for domestic violence programs while releasing a report showing 81 people were killed in Ohio last fiscal year as a result of such incidents.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network compiles the annual report of domestic violence homicides through an analysis of media reports and other resources.

The state's fatalities stemmed from 60 cases dating July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019, the group said. A third of those cases involved a perpetrator with prior charges or convictions for domestic violence.

"Very often the victim was in the process of leaving the relationship or had ended the relationship," Shelly Bell, the group's Linking Systems Project coordinator, said at a Statehouse event unveiling the report. "We know that leaving is the most dangerous time for a survivor of domestic violence."

In 83% of the cases in which a woman killed a man, there was a history of the woman being abused by the man, Ms. Bell said.

She pointed to the criminal justice system, which will often convict domestic violence victims who kill in self-defense.

"If those who had been killed by abusers had been able to defend themselves, they may very well be serving 15 years to life," she said.

The group used the report as an opportunity to thank lawmakers for including $1 million to support domestic violence programming in the state budget (HB 166).

"Until this budget cycle, Ohio provided no general fund support for our network of programs. Last year those programs provided counseling, court advocacy, housing support and other programs," said Mary O'Doherty, ODVN's president. "Until this year, Ohio's network of DV
programs relied completely on competitive federal funding and a small amount from fees generated at the county level."

The group thanked Rep. Laura Lanese (R-Grove City), who worked to include the funding in the state spending bill. After years of it not being included, she said the presence of a line item for the programming will make it more difficult for future general assemblies to ignore it.

"The fact that we didn't have funding before was rather shocking to me," Rep. Lanese said. "I made this my top priority because I knew the value of getting this in for the first time."

ODVN called on lawmakers to do more, including pass legislation (SB 43) to address domestic violence through penalty enhancements and a penalty for strangulation. "We are calling on legislators to get the guns out of the hands of abusers, to recognize strangulation as a precursor of murder," ODVN Board Chair Bridget Mahoney said. "We are asking that a steady, reliable and sufficient stream of funding for Ohio's domestic violence programs stays in Ohio's state budget."

"We need the changes now," she added.