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Recent Homicides Highlight Escalation of Domestic Abuse and Risk for Police Officers

Baton Rouge, Louisiana – In the wake of the recent tragic shooting of two police officers in East Baton Rouge Parish, advocates are expressing concern and highlighting the connection between domestic violence and murders of police officers.

On Sunday, veteran Baton Rouge Police Department officer Lt. Glenn Hutto Jr. was killed in the line of duty, and another officer was critically injured. The suspect, Ronnie Kato, is accused of also killing his girlfriend's stepfather in a domestic homicide earlier that day.

According to the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (LCADV), this type of crime is far too common. Police officers face extreme danger responding to incidents of domestic violence, and many offenders who murder police officers have a long history of domestic violence. Domestic abuse is often an unrecognized red flag in the criminal histories of many who murder police officers and other first responders. In fact, domestic violence calls are the most dangerous type of call for law enforcement officers. A 2015 report by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund found that domestic violence-related calls represented the highest number of fatal calls for police officers.

Mariah Wineski, executive director of LCADV, says these killings bring to light two major issues: the dangers faced by domestic abuse victims during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unfortunate connection between domestic violence and murders of police officers. "We are saddened for the families of all victims in this case, and for the entire Baton Rouge community. Domestic violence victims have faced immeasurable challenges in staying safe while navigating this pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders. While these orders are necessary for public health, home simply is not a safe place for many people, and unfortunately we have seen violence escalate," Wineski said.

The Coalition also highlighted the grim statistics linking domestic violence victims and police officers who fall victim to gun violence. An annual report by the Violence Policy Center, *When Men Murder Women*, ranks Louisiana second in the nation in the number of women murdered by men. Likewise, a 2015 analysis by Everytown for Gun Safety found that Louisiana ranks third in the nation for the rate of police officers killed with firearms.

“In domestic violence cases, officer safety is directly tied to victim safety,” Wineski said, emphasizing the importance of early accountability for domestic violence offenders, and access to safety resources for victims. “To promote officer safety, we must prioritize ending domestic violence, both during and after this pandemic.”

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The Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (LCADV) is a statewide network of programs, organizations, and individuals who share the goal of ending domestic violence in Louisiana. LCADV empowers its members and communities through advocacy, education, resource development, and technical assistance. LCADV is dedicated to bringing about change in our institutions, laws, politics, attitudes, and beliefs which will allow individuals to live free of violence. For more information, visit www.lcadv.org.