

From: Godfrey, Rob <RobGodfrey@gov.sc.gov>
To: Adams, Chaney <ChaneyAdams@gov.sc.gov>
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Subject: FOR GAVIN

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00 AM.

Excerpted Remarks from Governor Nikki Haley's Annual State of the State Address:

"There is no excuse for South Carolina to rank as the state in America with the highest percentage of women killed by men.

"Domestic violence is an issue, just like the inequalities in education, which has plagued us for far too long. Tonight, I say it will plague us to that extent no more.

"Last year the General Assembly passed a very real, very important bill to help rid South Carolina of the poison of domestic violence. I thank you for all the work that went into sending that bill to my desk.

"But we also know that our domestic violence epidemic is not going to be fixed by legislation alone. In order to truly solve this problem, it will take a complete culture change.

"So a year ago we established a domestic violence task force, comprised of 135 members representing 65 organizations and agencies across South Carolina. We committed to educating ourselves and each other about every aspect that a survivor goes through and all the contact points touched when a situation occurs, contact points that could be opportunities to save a life. We looked at not just the root causes, but also how these cases were being handled, county by county, throughout our state.

"We learned a lot. And we're taking action.

"First, victims are not victims – they are survivors. We know that domestic violence is a choice the abuser makes, not the survivor. Calling them survivors changes our culture to one of choice that they can make to get out of a bad situation. We need a culture of empowerment, rather than one of revictimization.

"Second, those survivors need to know that we have their backs – they need lawyers, not law enforcement officers, prosecuting domestic violence crimes against defense attorneys. We need officers to be officers out in the field, and we need prosecutors to be prosecutors in the courtroom. South Carolina is one of only three states that allow law enforcement officers to prosecute domestic violence crimes. That ends this year.

"My executive budget includes additional prosecutors and additional judges to fix this problem. No survivor deserves to show up in court and see a well-meaning but legally untrained police officer arguing his or her side, while a highly-paid defense lawyer argues on behalf of the abuser. If you join me, in South Carolina, no survivor ever will.

"There is more that we have done, and still more to do. That's why I have extended the taskforce. But after the action we have taken together this past year, survivors of domestic violence across South Carolina can take comfort in the knowledge that their government, and the people of our state, see them, hear them, and that they are no longer alone."

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Rob Godfrey
Office of Governor Nikki Haley
Desk: (803) 734-2028 | Mobile: (803) 429-6068