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NEWS RELEASE

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Ramsey County Attorney releases report from two-year study detailing need for major systems change in sexual assault response

Ramsey County and Saint Paul to bolster response with new investments in investigations and victim advocacy

Saint Paul, MN – Officials today announced findings and recommendations from a first-of-its kind sexual assault case review conducted by the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office (RCAO) that examined the entire pipeline of response – from the time an assault occurs, to when a victim presents at a hospital, to the response of advocacy services, police investigators, prosecutors, and the results of cases that make it to court. The findings reveal multiple opportunities for improvement in order to ensure victims feel supported in reporting to law enforcement and perpetrators are brought to justice.

“The results of this study clearly indicate that we need to do better for sexual assault victims in Ramsey County – and we will,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “Today, we are announcing the immediate first steps we are taking to improve our response and making a strong commitment to work together across disciplines to ensure victims get the response they deserve and perpetrators are held accountable.”

Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul have committed to increasing their investments in staff capacity to respond to incidents of sexual assault. Ramsey County will add two new sexual assault advocates to its Public Health department to enhance support for victims. In addition, the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD) will add two investigators to its family and sexual violence unit to increase its investigative capacity. This additional staffing will significantly improve the system’s capacity to efficiently and effectively respond to the volume of sexual assault reports in Ramsey County.

“The results of this study and the investments we are announcing today will enable us to significantly enhance our capacity to investigate these cases and hold perpetrators accountable,” said Saint Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell. “I want to thank the County for making these funds available so we can act immediately. We are looking forward to continuing to work together to ensure an effective response for victims of sexual assault.”

Following County Board action, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office will transfer \$287,000 from its criminal forfeiture account to the Saint Paul Police Department to fund two new sexual

assault investigators through 2019. Mayor Carter will work with the Saint Paul City Council and Police Chief Todd Axtell to continue this vital work with City investment in subsequent years.

“A close partnership between our city and county is critical to ensuring survivors of sexual assault have the support and resources they need,” said Mayor Melvin Carter. “The findings and recommendations included in this report give us the information we need to make that partnership even stronger, and ensure we are able to fulfill that promise.”

The Ramsey County Board will allocate \$225,000 to fund two additional Ramsey County Sexual Violence Services advocates through 2019, at which time the County Board will receive a recommendation to permanently integrate this funding into its budget.

“Ramsey County has long been invested in improving outcomes for victims of sexual assault in our community,” said Ramsey County Board Chair Jim McDonough. “I want to thank our County Attorney, Sheriff, and Public Health Director and staff for their leadership, along with our partner agencies, in revealing the inefficiencies in our current system and committing to improving our response for victims in our community.”

In partnership with local law enforcement, Ramsey County launched a Sexual Assault Justice Initiative in 2016 with two primary goals: to change our culture so victims feel empowered to report their abuse and to develop an infrastructure of response which improves outcomes for victims – one response at a time. The culture change began with a commitment by Ramsey County officials to become a *Start by Believing* community. Simultaneously, the RCAO embarked on a two-year review of police reports, prosecutor cases and interviewed professionals and victims/survivors to understand the current response.

Select highlights of the review:

- A significant number of victims/survivors who report to law enforcement have difficulty staying connected with the investigation and eventually drop off.
- Sexual assault advocacy organizations can help victims/survivors stay connected to the investigation and prosecution, but criminal justice professionals often need to reach out to facilitate that connection.
- These cases are complex to investigate and prosecute, and some law enforcement agencies have difficulty meeting staffing needs to assure thorough, robust investigations.
- Prosecuting sexual assault cases requires specific experience and training.

Select highlights of the recommendations:

- Implement best practices that ensure victims/survivors a compassionate and thorough response to their reports of sexual violence, focusing on measuring the work of the professionals rather than on conviction outcomes.
- Assure law enforcement, prosecution, and advocacy agencies are adequately staffed to address these cases.
- Implement formalized training and experience expectations for both law enforcement and prosecutors on sexual violence, trauma, and current best practices.

To review a copy of the report or view the press conference video, please visit our website. Resources for victims of sexual assault are also available on [Ramsey County's Sexual Violence Prevention & Response](#) webpage.