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NEWS RELEASE

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Prosecutors, police chiefs, sexual assault advocates and victim survivors publicly join forces to transform sexual assault response in Ramsey County through collaboration, new public investments

Implementation plan builds on prior actions taken by public officials and positive data trends since the launch of 2016 Start by Believing Campaign in Ramsey County

Saint Paul, MN – A year in the making, agencies who respond to sexual assault victims in Ramsey County came together today to lay out and publicly commit to the details of a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary plan to improve the outcomes that sexual assault victims too often experience after they report their assault to law enforcement. Ramsey County publicly highlighted many of the shortcomings and challenges last April as a part of the County Attorney's [2018 Sexual Assault Systems Review](#).

Since that time, local public officials have developed the Ramsey County Sexual Assault Response Collaboration, a detailed set of reforms and improvements in how system responders will collaborate to better serve the victims of sexual assault. Agency leaders and staff have met regularly over the past year to develop an implementation plan and have already begun or completed work in many key areas.

As a part of this collaboration, significant additional investigative, prosecution and advocacy resources have been allocated into agency budgets throughout Ramsey County in the past year. These resources recently paved the way for law enforcement to include victim advocates from Ramsey County's Sexual Offense Services program as a part of their investigations, and for law enforcement to have an assigned prosecutor involved much earlier in the response process.

While these new investments are making a difference today, the need for additional resources will become paramount as Ramsey County continues its [Start by Believing Campaign](#), which launched in April of 2016, thus empowering victims to report their abuse.

Sexual assault reports are up significantly

Since 2016, reports of criminal sexual conduct to law enforcement have dramatically increased, highlighted by a 75% increase in cases submitted by law enforcement for prosecution review to the county attorney's office. This has resulted in a 19% increase in cases charged and 17% increase in convictions from 2105 to 2018. While the overall charging and conviction rates compared to police incident reports have not improved during this time, there are many positive

trends such as the number of jury trials, which went from 3 to 12 in a period of three years and the amount of public investment in properly resourcing investigation, prosecution and advocacy has increased substantially.

The implementation plan calls for training all patrol officers throughout the county, who are often the first officers who respond to a call from a victim; decreasing first response wait times when a victim calls 911; and a commitment for more advanced trauma-informed training and team building for advocates, investigators and prosecutors. Law enforcement will conduct in-person investigative interviews with victim/survivors of sexual assault, following best practices for a trauma-informed approach.

“We believe that the inter-agency partnerships established in 2016 with focused leadership commitment to work collaboratively with increased resources is starting to make a difference in our community,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “With more victims coming forward to law enforcement in Ramsey County, I know that improved investigations – conducted with the involvement of victim advocates along with a more strategic deployment of prosecution resources – will continue to increase the number of sexual assault cases charged and perpetrators brought to justice,” Choi added.

Going forward, the Ramsey County Sexual Assault Protocol Team (RCSAPT) will manage the implementation of this collaboration. Ramsey County SOS Sexual Violence Services has a full-time staff member dedicated to coordination of the RCSAPT and is leading coordination efforts. Over the next eighteen months, the team will create a multi-disciplinary work group to execute the work plan, instituting the Implementation Plan for Systems Change in Ramsey County. The RCSAPT will work to monitor and provide transparency for the public as we seek to achieve better outcomes for victims of criminal sexual conduct and engage the public for more support of these efforts.

“This new partnership agreement between law enforcement, prosecutors and public health is an important next step in moving upstream to provide the support survivors need for healing and to focus on prevention,” said Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health Director Anne Barry. “The commitments we are making today acknowledge we must have a better, consistent, coordinated response to survivors if we are going to change the culture and reduce future instances of sexual violence.”

“Criminal sexual assault tears at the fabric of our community by taking away our collective sense of security, said Saint Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell. “Thanks to this initiative, we’ll now be using the same best practices to hold criminals accountable for their actions—while making us more effective. More importantly, it will help us secure justice for survivors.”

Ramsey County's work to address sexual violence began as a collaboration

- **Trauma-Informed Training:** In February, 2016, Public Health's SOS Sexual Violence Services sponsored nationally recognized sexual assault training expert Russell Strand to conduct a day-long workshop on trauma-informed interviewing for advocates and the entire [Ramsey County Sexual Assault Protocol Team](#). Established in 1998, the Protocol Team coordinates and implements an interagency response to sexual assault victims by promoting consistency, respect and cultural competency.
- **Start by Believing:** In April 2016, prosecutors, public health, law enforcement leaders and community advocacy groups launched [Ramsey County: A Start by Believing Community](#). A public awareness campaign designed to change the way in which the broader community, law enforcement, prosecution, and criminal justice partners respond to sexual violence in Ramsey County, this initiative works to instill a culture where victims feel empowered to report their abuse and to develop an infrastructure of response to improve outcomes for victims – one response at a time. As part of that launch, the Ramsey County Attorney commissioned a 2-year study of sexual assault incidents and cases in Ramsey County, focusing on law enforcement and prosecution responses.
- **Sexual Assault Systems Review:** In April 2018, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office released the [Ramsey County Sexual Assault Systems Review](#) which outlined multiple recommendations to improve the criminal justice system response to ensure victims feel supported in reporting to law enforcement and perpetrators are brought to justice.
- **New resources added:** As a result of the Systems Review, the County Attorney and Board of Commissioners immediately provided the funding to hire two new advocates at Public Health's SOS Sexual Violence Services and two new sexual assault investigators in the Saint Paul Police Department Sex Crimes Unit. Additionally, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office were awarded a 2-year grant under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) to fund a dedicated sexual assault investigator as well as a prosecutor.
- **Formation of Sexual Assault Collaboration:** In November 2018, law enforcement, prosecution and advocacy subject matter experts gathered in St. Paul with leadership from the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault to strategize about an ongoing trauma-informed, coordinated systems response to sexual violence. National training leader Russell Strand helped to organize the group's work into what became the Ramsey County Sexual Assault Collaborative.

For additional information, please see our [SARC website](#).

- Ramsey County SARC Implementation Plan
- Ramsey County Sexual Assault Response Collaboration Memo of Understanding
- Ramsey County Sexual Assault Work Fact Sheet

Note: Please contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.