

**Remarks of Catherine Pierce, Deputy Director
Office on Violence Against Women
at the
Business at its Best Conference
Chicago, Illinois
September 25, 2003**

I am so impressed with the diverse agencies and organizations represented here today and am delighted to be here to welcome you to the Business at its Best Conference. I bring greetings from Diane Stuart, the Director of the Office on Violence Against Women and from Kristina Rose, her Chief of Staff who had originally planned to be here with you today. It is so heartening to see the business leaders of this country engaged in public and community partnerships to end violence against women. Our office considers all of you to be critical to efforts address and respond to domestic violence. For so many of us, this is the most important work we will ever do.

I want to thank the other sponsors of this conference, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, the Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence, the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, the Family Violence Prevention Fund, and Verizon

Wireless. On behalf of the Office on Violence Against Women, your support and desire to make this issue a priority is gratefully acknowledged.

As I mentioned earlier, Kristina Rose was unable to be here today. She was very disappointed not to be here and I will be delivering her prepared remarks.

The Office on Violence Against Women administers financial and technical assistance to communities around the country that are creating programs, policies, and innovations aimed at ending violence against women. The long-term goal of our efforts is to change the culture so that crimes against women—and I am speaking specifically of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking—are considered unacceptable and will not be tolerated in our society. Changing the culture is an ambitious goal and we are well aware that these kind of changes do not happen overnight. However, we see it as our job to provide leadership to assist communities as they develop the tools and create the momentum necessary to put the wheels in motion.

But, in order to change the culture globally, we know we must

begin locally. And one critical place to start is with local businesses and places of employment. I want to acknowledge the tremendous work that is being done here in Chicago by the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and its Community Mobilization Team. They have brought local businesses and faith-based institutions together to work on this problem neighborhood-by-neighborhood and these individuals are to be commended.

Employers, whether it be the Federal government, local government, private industry, or the non-profit community, must set an example for their employees. When it comes to violence against women, there are many employers that have displayed surprising ingenuity and innovation in the development of their policies and programs. Many more need to follow their example.

We already know that domestic violence can have a devastating impact on the workplace. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Victims of intimate partner violence lose a total of nearly 8 million days of paid work—the equivalent to 32,000 full-time jobs and nearly 5.6 million days of household productivity as a result of the violence. 94% of corporate security directors rank

partner violence as a high security problem¹. The economic impact of domestic violence on small businesses can be devastating.

Not to mention the impact on victims. Homicide is the leading cause of death for women on the job, and 20% of those murders are perpetrated by an partner at the workplace². Let me give you a few examples:

- In Aurora, Colorado, a man turned violent after his wife left him. Their four year marriage had a history of domestic violence. He entered the cake store where she worked and shot his wife once in the upper torso, then he turned the gun on himself. A customer found the bodies. The couple had a 2 year old daughter and a 6 year old son.

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- In Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, a woman was shot and critically wounded when her husband visited her workplace. She had lived with her abusive husband for 20 years before she decided she had had enough. She moved out and filed a request for a protective order. When her husband went to the transmission shop where she worked, an argument ensued and her boss stepped in to save her. The boss was shot and killed trying to protect her and the wife was critically wounded.
- In Grand Junction, Colorado, a woman was in the process of leaving her husband. After a violent argument where the husband tried to suffocate his wife, she filed a temporary restraining order. A few weeks later, the husband showed up briefly at her workplace, the City Market, where she worked as a checker. They spoke briefly and he left. She didn't call the police, but called her father and asked him to come to the store. Before he could get there, her husband returned to the store and shot her, two bystanders, and himself.

There is a striking similarity to all three of these true stories. Each

one of these women was in the process of leaving her husband. The risk of danger to victims of domestic violence increases exponentially when the victim leaves the relationship. Many victims file restraining orders once they have left the abusive situation, and many of the orders state that the offender cannot come within a certain distance of her home or workplace. But as evidenced by two of these stories, they are not always effective in preventing the abuser from finding and confronting the victim in her place of employment.

Domestic violence spills into the workplace because it is an easy place for the abuser to find the victim. And as also evidenced by these stories, the victim was not the only one at risk. Three coworkers of the victims died in these violent attacks. It becomes imperative that employers develop sound work place violence policies that address the unique dynamics of domestic violence to ensure the safety of all employees.

It is vitally important that employers understand the important role they can play in providing an opportunity for victims to find the help they need to leave their abusive situations. Firing an employee because they are being abused or screening out

domestic violence victims during the recruitment process only exacerbates the problem. If an employer has been trained on the dynamics of domestic violence and has created effective policies (such as granting emergency leave so victims have the opportunity to file protection orders, develop safety plans, or flee abusive situations), it could be the key to helping a victim of domestic violence break free from the abuse. And that is when the culture really begins to change.

Violence against women in the workplace is not just a criminal justice issue. It is a health issue and an economic issue. The responsibility for tackling this problem does not lie with just one agency or group. We must take a coordinated approach to the issue if we are every to make any headway in eliminating its threat. With our colleagues in the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services, as well as with other experts across the country, we have begun examining this issue and how—at the federal level—can best provide assistance to employers.

In closing, I would like to pose some questions for you to consider while you are here at this meeting and when you return to your offices:

Does my company's employee assistance program have the resources available to them to assist victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking?

Is my company doing all it can to encourage reporting of domestic violence?

Have the managers within my company been adequately trained to recognize the signs of domestic violence?

Does my company support an environment conducive to open communication regarding safety issues?

Has my company considered selecting a domestic violence shelter to support through our community service initiative?

Is the security personnel staff at your company adequately trained on how to respond to domestic violence incidents?

I encourage you to have frank conversations with your colleagues about these questions here at this meeting and once you return

back to your offices.

My thanks to all of you for your leadership, your willingness and commitment to changing our world for the better, and for making the workplace a safer environment for women and their families.

You can save lives.

Enjoy your meeting.