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START BY BELIEVING

Awareness Campaign to Help Survivors of Sexual Assault

AKRON, Ohio (Wednesday, April 5, 2023) – To help survivors of sexual assault, Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh announced today the re-launch of an awareness campaign to help support crime victims, specifically survivors of sexual assault.

Billboards, bus ads, and posters will be placed throughout Summit County promoting Start By Believing. Information will also be posted on the Summit County Prosecutor's Office social media sites, urging people to Start By Believing.

“My goal as Summit County Prosecutor is to fight for crime victims and make our office and the criminal justice system as welcoming as possible. Throughout my more than 20 years as County Prosecutor, I have implemented many innovative programs, including being the first prosecutor's office in Ohio to have a facility dog to comfort crime victims and their families. That's why we have embraced the Start By Believing campaign. The best way to Start By Believing is to be supportive, patient, and don't judge or question. Instead of asking why something happened or blaming the victim, ask how you can help.”

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Prosecutor Walsh continued, “Less than 20-percent of sexual assault survivors report to police what happened to them. My hope is, with the support of the Start By Believing campaign, more survivors come forward to help us hold their attackers accountable.”

Start By Believing was created by the organization End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) to end the cycle of silence and change the way society responds to sexual assaults. Prosecutor Walsh launched the public awareness campaign in Summit County in 2019 to enhance her office’s continuing support of crime victims.

Sexual assault survivors often face disbelief and blame when they disclose their abuse, decreasing the chance they’ll report to police or seek help. This is why End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) created Start By Believing, the global campaign on challenging each of us to do better. This initiative was created to change the way society responds to sexual assault and emphasize that every response matters.

The first Wednesday of April is National Start By Believing day. It precedes National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, which is April 23rd through April 29th, and is sponsored by the Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime. April is also Sexual Assault Awareness Month. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Sexual Assault Awareness Month is a campaign to raise public awareness about sexual violence and educate communities on how to prevent it.