



Elliot Kolkovich

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START BY BELIEVING

TURN SUMMIT COUNTY TEAL to Support Survivors of Sexual Violence

AKRON, Ohio (Wednesday, April 3, 2024) – Summit County Prosecutor Elliot Kolkovich announced today the re-launch of a public awareness campaign to support crime victims, specifically survivors of sexual assault.

Start By Believing, launched by End Violence Against Women International, was created to end the cycle of silence and change the way society responds to sexual assault. The campaign starts by believing, then follows an evidence-based and complete investigation with the goal of holding offenders accountable and finding justice for survivors.

The first Wednesday of April is National Start By Believing day. It precedes National Crime Victims' Rights Week, which is April 21st through April 27th, 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.

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As part of the campaign, billboards will be installed throughout Summit County urging people to “Start By Believing” with the 24-hour hotline number for the Summit County Hope & Healing Resource Center – where the Rape Crisis Center and Battered Women’s Shelter is housed. The Summit County Prosecutor’s Office will also provide information on the Office’s various Social Media platforms.

The Summit County Prosecutor’s Office urges people to support victims of crime and avoid “why” questions – like “why did you do that” or “why were you in that part of town”. “Why” questions sound accusatory and could make people blame themselves for what happened.

“Victims of crime already have to deal with the stress and sometimes the stigma of what happened. I want our community to be supportive by reminding victims and survivors that it was not their fault and to not judge victims. Instead of asking why something happened, ask how you can help. Your reaction makes a difference,” said Prosecutor Kolkovich.

Several local offices, organizations, and businesses are also teaming up to “[Turn Summit County Teal](#)” to show support for survivors of sexual assault including the University of Akron, Summit County Clerk of Courts Tavia Galonski, Akron Children’s Hospital, Ohio State Representative Casey Weinstein, and Summit County Victim Assistance. [Teal](#) is the color used to spread awareness of Start By Believing Day and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The Summit County Prosecutor’s Office is also urging people to take the pledge to Start By Believing when someone tells them they’ve been sexually assaulted.

The City of Twinsburg is also joining the Prosecutor’s Office in “[Turning Summit Teal](#)”. Twinsburg Mayor Sam Scaffide added, “the City of Twinsburg is proud to support the “[Turn Summit Teal](#)” campaign for Sexual Assault Awareness, initiated by the Summit County Prosecutors’ office. It’s crucial to acknowledge that sexual assault remains the crime least likely to be reported. We assure all victims that should they choose to approach our Police Department, they will receive our full belief and support. Our gratitude goes out to Prosecutor Kolkovich and his team for spearheading this important campaign.”

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.

Former Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh started the Start By Believing campaign in Summit County in 2019 as a way to enhance the office’s continued support of crime victims.