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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 17, 2016

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Baker-Polito Administration Awards \$2.8 Million to 39 Communities Combating Violence Against Women

BOSTON – Governor Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Public Safety Secretary Dan Bennett today announced more than \$2.8 million in grant funding to help 39 community-based organizations and local and college campus police departments develop and strengthen prosecution strategies and victim services in cases involving violent crimes against women.

The grants were made possible through the Violence Against Women Act's (VAWA) Services Training Officers Prosecutors (VAWA STOP) Program administered by the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security's Office of Grants and Research.

"The Violence Against Women Act allows for collaborative approaches between community-based agencies, municipalities, and state agencies to address the crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking," **said Governor Charlie Baker**. "These grants are critical to develop and strengthen law enforcement, prosecution, and victim services in cases of violent crimes against women."

"The VAWA grants are an opportunity to offer support for our community based agencies, police departments and state agencies that provide critical services for victims of domestic and sexual violence across the Commonwealth," **said Lt. Governor Polito, chair of the Governor's Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence**. "Through the diligent efforts of those receiving grants today and many other community partners, we aim to make Massachusetts a safer state to live in for all women."

In April 2015, Governor Baker signed Executive Order 563, re-launching the Governor's Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence. Over the last year, the Council's priorities have included analyzing and reporting on the implementation of Chapter 260: An Act Relative to Domestic Violence. Last fall, a report was issued providing updates on each of the 49 actionable provisions within the law.

The Council today announced its priorities for the upcoming year and the future with the launch of work groups in five priority areas identified by the Council and the administration. Each group has established year one deliverables and will report back to the Council on their program next summer.

The work groups include:

Response and Assessment: to develop recommendations for improving the Commonwealth's identification and response to domestic violence high risk cases;

Housing Stability and Self Sufficiency: to cultivate housing stability and homeless prevention strategies for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence;

Human Trafficking: Children: to design and initiate the development of a standard, best practice model for identifying and responding to child trafficked victims, with year one specifically focused on the sexual exploitation of children;

Prevention Education Early Ed through Campus: to provide recommendations to the Administration on how to build a program focused on promoting healthy relationships through education and the prevention of harassment, stalking, dating and sexual violence for Massachusetts youth starting in pre-kindergarten and continuing through college;

Veteran/Military Families: to develop collaborations amongst military, sexual assault and domestic violence resources to increase accessibility of appropriate supports for veterans and military families.

"We are pleased to provide these awards to agencies that have demonstrated expertise in their respective program areas of victim services, prosecution, law enforcement and the court system across the Commonwealth," **said Secretary of Public Safety and Security Dan Bennett.** "We look forward to continuing this strong partnership to advance the critical missions that these organizations fulfill."

"VAWA funds are what fuels accessible services for survivors of crime in the

community. Anyone impacted by a crime—survivors, significant others, service providers, and the community in general—deserve access to comprehensive services, resources, and information,” **said Katia Santiago-Taylor, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)**. “At BARCC, the VAWA funds have helped us form a multidisciplinary approach to provide accurate information to sexual assault survivors and their families statewide called Access to Forensic Information. VAWA funds have made cross-disciplinary services like the AFI and many others possible. ”

The Violence Against Women Act was passed by Congress in 1994 and marked a turning point in the federal recognition of the extent and seriousness of violence against women, and solidified a commitment by the government to address the problem by providing federal resources for the issue. Over the last three years, nearly \$8 million in VAWA funds have been granted statewide to support domestic and sexual assault victims and their families.

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