

Dear Editor:

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. It's when, across the state and nation, we reflect with our partners on our collective progress and how we move forward together.

We recognize that we are in unprecedented times as we respond to COVID-19 and alter the course of our lives. Yet, we also recognize that sexual violence continues to impact Hoosiers, even in the midst of this pandemic. While the methods of working with clients have adapted, the commitment of all sexual assault advocates has not wavered. Not for one minute. Their work does not stop because neither does sexual violence.

The statistics are alarming. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, one in five Hoosier women have been sexually assaulted; Indiana ranks fourth highest in the nation for the number of reported rapes among high school girls and sixth highest in the nation for the number of boys raped during high school; across our nation nearly half, 50%, of LGBTQI citizens are sexually assaulted. Sadly, here in Indiana, 85% of all assaults go unreported.

These numbers are simply unacceptable. We must be better.

At ICESAHT, we empower Indiana communities to prevent sexual assault and human trafficking and serve those impacted through comprehensive training, advocacy, public awareness, and coordinated sexual assault and human trafficking services. We are working to ensure that appropriate, victim centered, trauma informed services are in place statewide; that laws and funding are in place that support victims and hold perpetrators accountable; and, continue to expand statewide primary prevention initiatives.

We're proud we have more than doubled the number of Rape Crisis Centers in Indiana. Only three served ten Indiana counties in 2015; now there are 12 serving 44 counties. We expect to add four more centers this year. We are also increasing the number of Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) where prosecutors, law enforcement, advocates and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners approach sexual assault cases through a victim centered lens.

If you or someone you know has been assaulted, or if the trauma from a previous sexual assault is surfacing, please visit our website at www.icesaht.org to find a Rape Crisis Center close to you.

Equally as important as increasing and enhancing services, is the expansion of primary prevention strategies that focus on the root causes of sexual violence with the goal of ending it.

Sexual violence is 100% preventable. We must start with believing survivors. Statistics indicate that 92 – 98% of victims are telling the truth. Rape is the only crime in which victims are more scrutinized than the rapist: “What were you wearing,” “Had you been drinking,” “What did you think would happen?” We blame the victim instead of holding the perpetrator accountable.

We are making progress and are grateful to all our partners who make the coalition work including the State of Indiana, colleges and universities, the medical and legal communities, law enforcement, non-profit and advocacy organizations, service providers, and community leaders, citizens and our philanthropic partners.

There is so much more work to do, because sexual assault awareness and prevention goes beyond the month of April. We're asking you to become an ally in our vision of a state without sexual violence.

Sincerely,

Tracey Horth Krueger
Chief Executive Officer
Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking