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For Immediate Release

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DA Provides Law Enforcement with Cameras to Better Document Domestic Violence Injuries

Grant Pays for Equipment to Capture DV Injuries, Bolster Prosecutions

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that her office is leveraging \$30,000 of a California Office of Emergency Services grant to purchase 35 cameras for law enforcement locations around San Diego County to help peace officers investigating domestic violence cases better document injuries during their investigations. Officers will also receive training on how to use the cameras and specifics on what aspects of injuries should be documented. The cameras are just the latest in a number of new DA-driven initiatives to address an increase in domestic violence cases in San Diego County.

“Pictures are not only worth a thousand words, they can also be a key piece of evidence that holds an abuser accountable, especially in domestic violence cases,” District Attorney Summer Stephan said. “Unfortunately, a large percentage of victims of domestic violence recant their original statements to police, because of fear, shame, embarrassment or other reasons stemming from power and control asserted by their abuser within the relationship. These cameras can help us preserve and document evidence – including evidence of strangulation, which is predictive of homicide, and allows us to move forward with prosecutions and fight this persistent crime in San Diego County.”

Last year, there were 17,306 domestic violence incidents reported in San Diego County – a four percent increase from the previous year according to a recent SANDAG crime report. In general, domestic violence cases are underreported, so experts say the figure is likely higher. The DA’s Family Protection Division currently has 21 pending murder cases, 11 of which involve the murder of an intimate partner. *(The remaining cases involve elders and infants.)*

Over the last five years, there has been a 20 percent increase in the number of domestic violence cases submitted to the District Attorney’s Office.

Part of properly documenting injuries involves taking high-quality photos that can be used as evidence in court. Police officers and other first responders document domestic violence related injuries, but often do not have access to a quality camera, which can cause photos to be blurry, improperly lit or low in resolution. Providing proper tools and training to those who are documenting domestic violence cases will assist the District Attorney’s Office in prosecuting these sensitive cases and continue its focus on fighting domestic violence.

“One of the gaps in documenting injuries was that pictures were blurry or did not capture what the officer was seeing in the field,” said Craig Carter, Escondido Police Chief and President of the San Diego County Police Chiefs’ and Sheriff’s Association. “Our medical professionals tell us that a good camera, along with someone who is trained in using it could best solve that problem. These cameras will be one more tool for our first responders to better document the evidence they are seeing in the field.”

Camera packages will be disseminated to all law enforcement agencies in June along with a forensic photography training video.

Last year, the District Attorney spearheaded a countywide Strangulation Protocol for law enforcement, which outlines a coordinated community response on how to handle strangulation cases. Studies have shown that episodes of non-fatal strangulation have a greater likelihood of leading to homicide. The Strangulation Protocol puts into place a system of uniform detection, documentation and response so defendants and victims receive consistent treatment across the county.

Since the District Attorney’s Office started taking a deeper look at the potential lethality of non-fatal strangulation and spearheaded the strangulation protocol, the number of prosecutions involving strangulation has increased from 32 percent to 67 percent.

During meetings for the protocol, stakeholders revealed one of the gaps in law enforcement response to these potentially lethal cases was the lack of good photographs to document injuries. After consultation with medical professionals and forensic photography experts, District Attorney Summer Stephan identified funding through the Cal OES Victim Services grant to purchase camera packages for all law 12 enforcement agencies in San Diego County – or 29 substations.

The Protocol and the cameras are only a fraction of what the DA’s Office is doing to bring awareness to and to fight domestic violence. The District Attorney is also working on at least nine other initiatives from forensic exams to recognizing the link between homelessness and domestic violence, making the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office a leader in best practices when it comes to addressing domestic violence.

If you or someone you know is the victim of domestic violence, please call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue justice and support victims daily across San Diego County. DA Summer Stephan has devoted her life to protecting children and families and providing justice to the voiceless and most vulnerable. She is a national leader in the fight against sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and has served as a Deputy District Attorney in San Diego County for 28 years.

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