Successful prosecution of sexual assault and domestic violence is a difficult mountain for prosecutors to climb. The obstacles prosecutors encounter may vary from state to state, but the challenges are universal. Prosecutors must maintain a delicate balancing act — they must identify victim needs and understand distinct victim responses, work with experts, coordinate with victim advocates, introduce and respond to pretrial motions, and overcome evidentiary issues in court.

To meet these challenges, prosecutors need comprehensive training, education, and assistance from diverse, experienced professionals. State coalitions against sexual assault and domestic violence can guide prosecutors, providing resources to help them hold offenders accountable and keep victims safe.

**STATE COALITIONS: A BACKGROUND**

State coalitions first emerged over 20 years ago when organizers came together in order to influence public policy and have an impact on other state and national concerns for sexual assault survivors. In 1997, the Violence Against Women Act provided additional funding for coalitions to help them to forge stronger collaborations with prosecutors and other allied professionals. Today, all 50 U.S. states and most territories have coalitions to fight violence against women: 19 address both domestic and sexual violence; 34 coalitions use their resources to fight sexual assault exclusively.

Coalitions collaborate with federal, state, and local organizations to fight sexual and domestic violence. Talented coalition staff in each state supports the creation of multidisciplinary response teams and other innovative collaborations. They coordinate training and technical assistance to federal, state and/or local law enforcement agencies to develop or enhance strategies to address identified problems in the fight against violence against women, and they bring local programs closer. Together, the programs identify gaps in services and coordinate activities. The coalitions also organize and sponsor statewide, regional and/or community-based trainings, meetings and workshops for law enforcement, victim advocates, survivors, legal service providers, and criminal justice representatives.

**RSP: A STRONG RESOURCE FOR STATE COALITIONS NATIONALLY**

The National Resource Sharing Project (RSP) provides technical assistance and resource sharing to strengthen state coalitions. Coalition leaders from five states created the RSP, a nationwide consortium of state coalitions developed to help individual state coalitions address victims’ needs and battle sexual assault more efficiently. At the time the RSP emerged, there were 26 new or developing sexual assault coalitions in the United States. The RSP recognized the importance of building state infrastructure to ensure a well coordinated response to survivors. The RSP strengthens state coalitions’ organizational capacity and helps them...
to collaborate effectively with criminal justice, faith-based organizations, health systems and other entities responding to sexual assault. Coali-
tions working independently and often with RSP assistance have developed innovative partnerships with prosecutors and other allied professionals across the country. The highlights of activities and programs created by coalitions in Pennsylvania, New York, Washington State and South Carolina provide outstanding examples of the opportunities these groups offer to prosecutors.

Case Studies: PA, NY, WA, and SC Coalitions

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) works at the state and national levels to prevent sexual violence. PCAR uses its voice to challenge public attitudes, raise public awareness, and effect critical changes in public policy, protocols, and responses to sexual violence. PCAR offers numerous resources to victims and provides training for prosecutors and other allied professionals. In 2005, for example, PCAR will sponsor an educational event entitled, First Responders of Sexual Assault, described as “a comprehensive training for law enforcement, prosecutors, medical personnel, advocates, and other professionals.” Topics include sexual assault evidence collection, drug facilitated sexual assault, rape trauma syndrome, and understanding sexual offenders. PCAR offers the training at 6 different locations throughout Pennsylvania to reach as many prosecutors and allied professionals as possible. PCAR is also collaborating with APRI’s National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women (NCPVAW) to develop the National Institute on the Prosecution of Sexual Violence.

Another important group is the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). Established in 1976, PCADV coordinates a statewide network of community-based programs. PCADV also provides extensive training to prosecutors, law enforcement and criminal justice personnel, health care providers, religious leaders, drug and alcohol counselors, batterer intervention service providers, and other professionals who seek justice and safety for battered women. Specifically, PCADV sponsors PA Stop training for prosecutors and other allied professionals, which helps to improve the criminal justice system’s response to domestic violence.

The New York Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYCASA) has also achieved great success with creating statewide collaborations between their organization and prosecutors. Within the past year, for example, the NYCASA collaborated with the New York State Prosecutor’s Training Institute to develop a curriculum on statutory rape and organized a conference to present the curriculum to a standing room only crowd of educators and prosecutors.

The Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP) has forged extensive relationships with prosecutors at the state level. The coalition obtained a grant to partner formally with the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (WAPA). As part of their agreement, WCSAP’s staff attorney serves as a member of the state’s Special Assault Committee. The committee is comprised of representatives from WAPA. The coalition’s participation in the committee provides an opportunity for prosecutors to hear WCSAP’s concerns and ideas on how to keep victims safe. In exchange, the coalition hears prosecutors’ views and establishes contacts with sexual assault prosecutors throughout Washington State. The coalition and prosecutors association also have agreed to participate in reciprocal training opportunities. Every other year WAPA invites the coalition’s staff attorney to make

NCPVAW Seeks Contributions to Trial Handbooks

Under its current cooperative agreement with the Office on Violence Against Women, NCPVAW is writing two trial handbooks, one on the prosecution of domestic violence and one on the prosecution of sexual violence. NCPVAW intends to make the handbooks available electronically to every prosecutor’s office in the country. The handbooks will be designed for ease-of-use in court and will contain all of the written resources a prosecutor needs to successfully prosecute domestic and sexual violence. NCPVAW is seeking sample foundation questions, voir dire questions, checklists, motions, and opening and closing arguments, as well as any other useful resources. Prosecutors interested in contributing to the handbooks should contact NCPVAW at ncpvaw@ndaa-apri.org or at 703-549-4253.
a presentation to prosecutors about sexual assault and preserving victims’ safety. On the alternating years, WCSAP invites prosecutors to speak to legal advocates at a coalition sponsored conference about sexual assault prosecution and victims’ needs.

The South Carolina Coalition to prevent Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) has formed groundbreaking collaborations with community organizations and law enforcement. SCCADVASA organizes and sponsors training for nurses, advocates, law enforcement personnel, and judges. This June, SCCADVASA will proudly organize their first course specifically designed to focus on prosecutors and judges who handle sexual assault and domestic violence cases. The course is entitled, Balancing the Scales of Justice: Building An Effective Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence. At the conference, prosecutors can learn tips on evidence-based prosecution, understanding victim responses, and overcoming the consent defense in a sexual assault case. Additionally, SCCADVASA partners with the South Carolina Division of Social Services to provide training for law enforcement, advocates, lawyers, and health care providers.

Innovative collaborations between state coalitions and prosecutors are not limited to only Pennsylvania, New York, Washington State, and South Carolina. Talented coalition staff in all 50 U.S. States and most territories work with prosecutors to create a united front in the fight against sexual assault and domestic violence.

APRI’S COMMITMENT TO COALITIONS AND CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

APRI’s National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women has reached out to support and communicate with state coalitions. APRI signed a memorandum of understanding with the RSP and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault to improve criminal justice partnership infrastructure for State Sexual Assault Coalitions. APRI, in conjunction with the RSP, will develop and implement a “train the trainer” program for state and territorial sexual assault coalition staff, as well as trainings to improve the criminal justice response to sexual assault survivors. APRI and RSP will use criminal justice collaborations to provide a coordinated response to emerging technical assistance needs for state and territorial sexual assault coalitions.

APRI will take the lead to encourage cooperation between prosecutors and state coalitions. Prosecutors, however, should actively take steps to identify their state coalitions and communicate ideas and concerns with coalition staff. They should attend coalition sponsored trainings and offer ideas to coalition leaders that can be used to protect victims’ safety and hold abusers accountable. Good communication between prosecutors and coalition staff can lead to more comprehensive training opportunities for prosecutors and more effective service to victims. State coalitions can also help to form a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) in local communities. They can organize and sponsor training opportunities for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and can support legislative efforts to improve their state’s criminal statutes and laws for victims’ rights.

Prosecutors and state coalitions should be wonderful partners. If the two groups reach out to understand each other’s role and resources, they can ensure greater success nationwide in the fight to end domestic and sexual violence.

RESOURCES

http://www.nsvrc.org/resources/orgs/coalitions/coalitions_atof.html#al

http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/regions.html

With special thanks to Cat Fribley of the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the National Resource Sharing Project (RSP) for her great insight and contributions to this article.
In an attempt to be more responsive to prosecutors’ needs, NCPVAW has re-designed its Web site to enable prosecutors to request technical assistance packets on commonly requested topics. Available packets include information on the following topics: Crawford, Cross Examination of a Recanting Victim in a Domestic Violence Case, Preventing Jury Nullification, Sample Voir Dire Questions, Tips for Testifying for SANE’s, and Sample Pretrial Motions. Check our Web site to see the complete list or to request these packets (http://www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/programs/vawa/vaw_home.html).

For more information, contact NCPVAW at ncpvaw@ndaa-apri.org or 703-549-4253.

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