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November 19, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

I write to urge your swift implementation of competitive grants to law enforcement agencies and victim services organizations to implement evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches in responding to and investigating domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. This initiative would mirror the Abby Honold Act, nonpartisan legislation in Congress directing the creation of these grants within the Office on Violence Against Women.

Studies show that when trauma is experienced, the part of the brain that normally records events often shuts down, leaving less advanced portions of the brain to record the event. Most interview techniques are developed to specifically tap into this area (the prefrontal cortex). Therefore, information collected in the normal manner may be inhibited, potentially distorting the accuracy of recalling event details. This often leads to misguided suspicion of the victim.

When University of Minnesota student, Abby Honold, reported her rape to the police and investigators, she went into shock and was unable to articulate or remember important details, which would have led to the prosecution of the perpetrator. However, when she was hospitalized after interviews with the police, the accompanying nurse was trained to use the Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI) interviewing method when working with trauma victims. This process allowed the nurse to make Abby feel comfortable, helping Abby to correctly explain and remember what happened, which ultimately led to the prosecution of her perpetrator.

Creating a demonstration program at the Department of Justice to issue grants in order to promote trauma-informed training for law enforcement and other personnel would be a critical improvement in our justice system. This is an opportunity for the administration to take decisive action in the fight for victims of sexual assault and other forms of trauma, by improving the care and treatment they receive while ensuring accurate crime information is collected and submitted to law enforcement.

We must continue to protect those like Abby Honold who have experienced great trauma. I greatly appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress