

Cape men take White Ribbon pledge to end domestic violence

By **Conor Powers-Smith**

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Cape residents gathered in South Yarmouth to pledge their commitment to ending domestic violence on Thursday, March 5 as part of White Ribbon Day, an international campaign to bring awareness to the issue and encourage men to take an active part in stopping abuse.

Staged by Hyannis-based Independence House, and hosted by the Cape Cod Irish Village on Route 28, the event featured members of government, law enforcement, and nonprofit groups sharing their experiences with domestic and sexual violence, and urging men to take responsibility for ending it.

"It's not just an individual issue, it's a societal issue," said Independence House Executive Director Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, urging men to make their disapproval of domestic violence clear.

"Well-meaning men must speak up, and not remain silent," Hurge-Putnam said. "Men who are not abusive must challenge men who are abusive."

"It's our responsibility, now, to not allow this to happen, to not turn a blind eye," said State Rep. Brian Mannal, D-Barnstable. "We have more work to do."

"Men who abuse women are not men at all; they are cowards," said State Rep. Tim Whelan, R-Brewster, an trooper with the State Police for 26 years. "I learned a lot of important things about domestic violence during my career as a police officer."

Whelan recounted the story of a woman who fled her partner after waking up to find him kicking her in the stomach. When police responded to the couple's home, Whelan said, "the coward had run," necessitating a search that lasted several days, and ended when the man was discovered hiding in the bedroom closet of a friend's child.

Whelan said similar incidents were, and are, all too common, making him an ardent supporter of efforts to end domestic abuse. "I'm proud, as a legislator, to stand with Independence House," he said. "I will stand with you for the rest of my life, as a legislator and beyond."

Yarmouth Deputy Police Chief Steven Xiarhos said dealing with domestic abuse on a regular basis takes a toll on police. "The things we see every day, it's very demanding," he said. "A police officer commits suicide on average once every day."

Xiarhos echoed the need for men to avoid being bystanders to abuse. "It is so important as men that we have integrity," he said. "That's the key word."

Hurge-Putnam said progress had been made in recent years. "It wasn't that long ago that the issue of domestic and sexual violence seemed insurmountable," she said. Programs such as Mentors in Violence Prevention, which Independence House administers in Dennis-Yarmouth, Barnstable, and Falmouth High Schools, are critical to changing societal attitudes, she added. "As we look to further our preventive efforts, we completely understand that we must reach the next generation."

Hurge-Putnam said the focus must be shifted from the mindset of the victim to that of the abuser. Asking why women stay in abusive relationships and similar questions does not advance the effort to make violence universally unacceptable, she said. "Those are all legitimate questions, okay? They are. But they don't solve the problem," she said. "We must start asking the right questions."

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