

DA aims to cut down on domestic violence

By Robert Mills, rmills@lowellsun.com

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District Attorney Marian Ryan with police and officials and students at Greater Lowell Technical High School Monday, when Ryan was on hand to train cosmetology students how to spot signs of domestic violence among their clientele. COURTESY PHOTO

TYNGSBORO -- District Attorney Marian Ryan has helped train over 1,700 cosmetologists and barbers to spot signs of domestic violence, and she trained about 50 more at Greater Lowell Technical High School Monday as legislation is pending to require such training for licensed professionals.

Ryan visited the vocational high school in Tyngsboro as part of the Cut It Out program, a nationwide effort to get cosmetologists, barbers, manicurists and massage therapists to recognize signs of violence among their clients.

"People tell their hairdressers amazing things they wouldn't tell their best friend," Ryan told aspiring hairdressers in Lowell several years ago as part of the same program.

Ryan said victims of such violence are often more likely to open up to their hairdressers, and that hairdressers are in a unique position to spot bruises or missing hair or other signs that something is amiss.

She has said domestic abusers also often feel safe letting victims go to salons because they want the victim to look good to hide the signs of violence.

But while the program has reached over 1,700 people in Middlesex County since 2009, Ryan is now supporting pending legislation that would require all aestheticians, barbers, cosmetologists, electrologists, hairdressers, manicurists and massage therapists to complete an hour of domestic violence and sexual assault awareness training when obtaining or renewing their licenses.

The bill, House Bill 1973, is sponsored by Rep. Christine Barber, D-Somerville.

The Cut It Out program is a public-private partnership that trains people to recognize signs of violence while also introducing them to agencies and resources that can help victims.

"In many incidents, domestic violence survivors may feel a shame or stigma associated with the abuse, and aestheticians often are some of the few people that men and women experiencing domestic abuse may confide in without fear," Ryan said in a press release.

The World Health Organization estimates that one in three women experience either sexual or physical violence in their lives.

"By fostering a relationship with community leaders and law enforcement officials, our students are not only prepared to begin their careers, they are also prepared to make a positive and proactive difference in the lives of others," GLTHS Superintendent Phil Mastrocola said in a press release.

Ryan has provided the same training at Nashoba Valley Technical High School and Empire Beauty School in Lowell, among other locations.

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