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# White Ribbon Day in Yarmouth



Zoom

Sheriff Jim Cummings, Independence House Executive Director Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, and District Attorney Michael O'Keefe. Staff photo by Conor Powers-Smith

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Dozens of men pledged to oppose violence against women at the fourth annual Cape Cod White Ribbon Day event at the Irish Village on Route 28 Thursday morning, March 3

. An international movement aimed at shifting attitudes toward domestic, sexual, and other forms of violence, the White Ribbon campaign began in Canada in response to the massacre of 14 women at a Montreal university in 1989. The local event is a joint effort by Yarmouth police, the Cape and Islands District Attorney's Office, and the Hyannis-based advocacy and counseling nonprofit Independence House.

"Intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence women experience," said Independence House Executive Director Lysetta Hurge-Putnam. Worldwide, she said, about 30 percent of women experience domestic violence at some point in their lives, and the statistic in the US is 25 percent. Sexual violence is only slightly less common. "If you know four women, you know someone who's experienced intimate partner violence. If you know five women, you know someone who's experienced sexual violence."

"This is an issue that involves different types of relationships," said Cape & Islands District Attorney Michael O'Keefe. "But it is predominantly men being violent against women."

YPD Deputy Chief Steven Xiarhos said his sister had almost been the victim of a sexual assault when they were growing up in New Bedford, an attack that was only prevented by the intervention of a nearby group of men. "From that moment on, I said to myself, 'I am going to be a police officer,'" he said. The White Ribbon campaign emphasizes the need for men to not just avoid committing violence against women themselves, but do anything they can to prevent violence by others.

Xiarhos said perpetrators of domestic violence often try to convince their victims that going to the police is useless, since their stories will not be believed. He urged anyone experiencing violence to report it. "If something's happening, tell us, we believe you."

Retired Barnstable District Court Judge Joseph Reardon said his attitude toward the domestic violence cases he presided over changed during his time on the bench. "I used to become angry at the women for allowing this to happen, because I didn't have any understanding of the dynamics," he said. "I found out all of the flaws I had in dealing with these situations."

Reardon said the change was due in large part to the Independence House advocates who help steer battered women through the legal system. "It's a thankless job, but judges appreciate it greatly."

Two leaders of the Mentors in Violence Prevention program at local schools spoke as well. Jack Giberti, co-president of the Barnstable High School MVP chapter, and Paxton Reed, his counterpart at Cape Cod Regional Technical High School in Harwich, recently led a successful effort to cancel a concert by singer Don McLean planned for April at BHS, reacting to the "American Pie" writer's arrest on domestic violence charges in Maine in January.

"As young people's bodies grow, our minds do as well," Reed said. He quoted Frederick Douglass on the importance of teaching children respect for others at a young age: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

State Rep. Brian Mannal, D-Barnstable, related an incident in which he'd witnessed a driver commit violence against a female passenger, confronting the man and then following the car until police arrived to make an arrest. Mannal said exposing the issue of domestic violence, and getting nonviolent men to take an active role in opposing it, is a large part of the solution. "For so long as a culture we've hidden it and we've not talked about it."

State Rep. Tim Whelan, R-Brewster, and Barnstable County Sheriff Jim Cummings also spoke, drawing attention to the need for violence prevention programs.

### **No More march**

Independence House will team with the local chapter of the ManKind Project to stage the second annual No More Men's March against domestic violence on Sunday, May 15, from 1 to 4 p.m., beginning at Cape Cod Synagogue at 145 Winter Street in Hyannis.

Proceeds benefit Independence House. Participants are encouraged to donate \$20, boys under 18 march free. More information and registration is available at [indhouse.ejoinme.org/march](http://indhouse.ejoinme.org/march).