

OCTOBER 3, 2015

# An escape from domestic violence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Shelters throughout Florida offer families hope

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Everyone can play a role in helping

BY COLUMBA BUSH

*[www.fcadv.org](http://www.fcadv.org)*

The 2014 Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Uniform Crime Report reflects a 10.2 percent increase in domestic violence homicides, which represents a stunning 20.9 percent of all homicides in our state. During the 2014/2015 fiscal year, Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers provided 546,658 nights of emergency shelter to 15,397 survivors and their children, many who fled a violent home with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

For the past 15 years, I have worked side by side with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) to raise awareness about the impact of domestic violence on our state, our communities and our families. During this time, I learned that our certified domestic violence centers are the heart and soul of prevention and intervention.



BUSH

My work in Florida has taught me that the strength of one shelter is a direct result of the unity of all shelters working toward the common goal of ending domestic violence.

During the past several months, I have traveled the country touring domestic violence shelters in both large and small states.

I have spent hours talking with advocates working in shelters and continue to hear about the lack of available resources to provide critical emergency shelter services to survivors and their children.

These advocates are warriors in their communities and work tirelessly to help women, children and men devastated by domestic violence.

In one shelter, I met a mother holding a 2-week-old infant while she discussed a potential job opportunity with an advocate. At another shelter, a survivor shared her story of survival, which was built upon the foundation of hope for the future. And during one tour, I spoke with a proud 12-year-old boy who just returned from a baseball game where he was named Most Valuable Player.

Each of these visits inspired me and reaffirmed my commitment to work harder to raise awareness about domestic violence while also increasing resources for survivors and their children.

October is recognized nationally as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time when we honor and remember those who have lost their lives at the hands of someone they once loved and trusted. It is also a time to celebrate the lives of survivors who were able to escape their violent homes.

As part of my efforts each year, I ask you to engage in one activity during October to raise awareness about domestic violence.

Each year, I am amazed and delighted with the breadth of your creativity, from educating your children about healthy relationships to volunteering with your local domestic violence center.

Many of you emailed me with updates of your ongoing activities to combat this crime that plagues too many families.

I love hearing about your efforts to raise awareness about domestic violence, so please continue to email me at [columba.bush@fcadvfoundation.org](mailto:columba.bush@fcadvfoundation.org).

By taking action, you are lending your voice to those individuals most silenced and affected by domestic violence. In addition to your local efforts, consider contributing in one of the following additional ways: Consider joining Jeb and me at the fourth annual FCADV Foundation Door to Hope dinner on Oct. 17 at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables. Visit: [fcadv.org/foundation/door-to-hope](http://fcadv.org/foundation/door-to-hope) for information.

For the first time, the FCADVF was selected to participate in the Allstate Foundation's Purple Purse Challenge for an opportunity to win \$100,000 to support Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers.

Please consider donating to the Purple Purse Challenge before Oct. 27 by clicking donate (or [bit.ly/fcadvpp](http://bit.ly/fcadvpp)), for more information [fcadv.org/purple-purse](http://fcadv.org/purple-purse).

If you or someone you know is living in fear, call the toll-free statewide Florida Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-500-1119 for help.

You are not alone.

*COLUMBA BUSH, FORMER FIRST LADY OF FLORIDA, IS A FOUNDING BOARD MEMBER OF THE FLORIDA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOUNDATION, INC.*

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article37394766.html#storylink=cpy>