



**State of Alaska  
Department of Public Safety  
Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

**Sean Parnell, Governor  
Joseph A. Masters, Commissioner**

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**Domestic Violence Awareness Month  
Choose Respect March 2012 Anchorage, Alaska**

**Richard Irwin's Remarks  
CDVSA Vice-Chair and Public Member**

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the Governor, Mrs. Parnell (who are in Fairbanks this year). Thank you to the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault staff, for making significant strides to end Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse in our state. I also applaud all those shelters and assisting agencies who have been standing in the gap for the wounded men, women, boys and girls of our state by providing safety, intervention and tools for healing broken hearts.

It has been said; "If we do not go into our future, our past becomes our future." I believe that. Alaskans are known as people who can step up to the greatest challenges - and overcome. Alaska is often said to be "rich in resources." Usually the resources referred to are our natural resources: oil, minerals, sea life, timber, etc. Today I want to highlight what I believe is Alaska's most precious resource gift and treasured possession – our people. I want to challenge us today to consider the value we assign to this gift.

In the past, we have we have, too often, stood by while thousands of people suffered unspeakable harm. We have been silent, blinded by our denial, or paralyzed by fear while this plague that has swept across "The Great Land."

Today, much like the famous sled dog trek to deliver the diphtheria healing serum to Nome, many years ago... we stand ready to march across our state to stop this disease of domestic violence and sexual abuse. We choose respect!!!

Picture with me for a moment the true story I am about to tell you.... Awakened in the middle of the night by the screams of their mother and the violent rage of their father, two young children slipped out of their beds and climbed down the stairs in the dark, shaking with terror. When they reached the bottom step, they huddled up with their legs pulled close to their chests. The little girl tightly gripped the arm of her older brother while the two listened and winced at every loud snap of the belt while their mother screamed, pleading with her husband to stop. The beating seemed to last for an eternity. The violence finally subsided and both parents left the bathroom. The children stepped out of the darkness and peered around the corner to see inside of the

bathroom. To their horror... blood was splattered all over the walls, in the bathtub and on the floor... their mother's blood.

That scenario was replayed many times over the years. Different rooms, different forms of rage but the impact on those growing young hearts was still the same. Innocence was stolen from the hearts of two little children who were old enough to understand that domestic violence breaks more than the skin and that the bruises left penetrate far beyond the surface. Domestic violence leaves deep scars in a person's heart. The wound remains there until, hopefully, healing comes to the damaged heart – as in the end of my story. People can heal from the damage of sexual and violence abuse. They can run on, into their God-given destiny. They can have healthy relationships and their children and grandchildren will forever be grateful that the cycle of abuse was broken in their family.

Statistics nationwide, including Alaska, indicate that children, who experience domestic violence and sexual abuse, whether personally or as witnesses, are at a far greater risk to have far greater struggles in life in general. As adults they struggle with what a healthy marriage is supposed to look like or how a healthy family is supposed to function. Emotional issues plague them. The simplest things - giving and receiving love - can feel impossible because what they thought was love was, in fact, perversion and poison to their soul. They struggle to trust others. In fact ...their trust is broken. We have learned that healing a broken heart is a process but it's a process worth engaging in because you find real life on the other side of a wounded heart.

Real love is when you move towards someone else with their best interest in mind. Real love brings light to dark places where secrets cannot hide. Real love doesn't control but nurtures. It encourages hope. It embraces truth and provides an environment for healing.

Nearly one out of every three women will be abused in Alaska. The statistical data often focuses on the female population. But let's not forget the untold number of young boys who have had their innocence robbed as well. Those little boys grow up not knowing what real love should look like or how they should respect and treat their wives and children. Those who do not find healing for their wounds too often repeat the cycle of dysfunction. But I know, there is hope!

This is the time to “front load,” investing in our children and making prevention of abuse a priority. Fire trucks will always be needed and prisons will have to be built because we live in a fallen world. Now is the time for greater focus on prevention! Now, more than ever, Alaskans must speak out. Get help if you have been abused. Get help if you have brought harm to others. Help can be found!

Men, women and children, find the tools you need to create healthy marriages and build strong families. I applaud those who provide services now for hurting Alaskans but we need so many more to step up to bring healing to our land.

As a pastor I challenge church leaders, across our state, to model, teach and impart what a healthy family looks like. Become a part of the solution. Make time in your preaching schedule to speak about domestic violence and sexual abuse. Provide programs in your church that offer healing for all impacted.

We must end Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse so that our generation can find healing and for our children's children to be able to run into their future. It is time to place a much greater value on Alaska's greatest resource. It is time to say, "Enough is enough!" It is the time to end Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse in our state, in our generation! It is not an option! Alaska's future is at stake. We must choose respect!

I also want to take this opportunity to express our sincere love and prayers as the search continues for Samantha Koenig. We are thankful that the true heart of Alaska has been seen; particularly with so many thousands of people who have helped to bear the burden with this family and to be part of the solution in locating Samantha. If you have any information, please contact the FBI or Anchorage Police Dept.

Again, thank you for being here and if you would like to be a part of expanding our sphere of influence in ending domestic violence and sexual assault please contact the Governor's office or engage with the programs that currently exist in addressing this disease. We will change the damaged part of Alaska culture!