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***GOVERNMENT LEADERS, SENIOR POLICY MAKERS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERTS  
DISCUSS MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO STOP DATING VIOLENCE AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL  
YOUTH AT CAPITOL HILL EVENT***

***Promising New Initiatives Prioritize Early Intervention to Demonstrate that Middle School Matters***

**Washington, DC — February 10, 2011** — Today, the Family Violence Prevention Fund and Jewish Women International join Honorary Hosts Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Congressman John Lewis (D-Georgia), Congresswomen Gwen Moore (D-Wisconsin) and Congressman Dave Reichert (R-Washington), leaders from the Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control, and the Office on Violence Against Women of the Department of Justice at a briefing on Capitol Hill to discuss “Why Middle School Matters,” promising initiatives that communities, schools, and parents can use to address teen dating violence and the federal policy implications of the work from the field. The briefing will highlight how the middle school years offer key moments for education and prevention of teen dating violence when youth are just beginning to date or establish romantic relationships.

This briefing is being held during “National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month,” created by a resolution championed by Senator Crapo and Congressman Lewis dedicating the entire month of February to this issue, and aimed at educating the public about the debilitating problem of dating violence among our young people.

"If we can reach young people in middle school," said Rep. Lewis, "to make them aware of the nature of abuse and show them how they can prevent it, we may be able to stop this spiraling cycle of pain before middle school students get involved in it. Teen dating violence can happen to any young person. It knows no socioeconomic boundaries; that is why it is so insidious. It endangers the well being of any young person who is victimized by abuse and spreads the psychological damage young people experience within their families to innocent, impressionable teenagers who are not equipped to handle the consequences."

“We need to make sure we’re talking to our children about dating violence so that they can identify the warning signs and hopefully prevent it altogether,” says Rep. Moore, co-chair of the Congressional Women’s Caucus.

Sue Carbon, the Director of The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), Department of Justice will be serving on the panel as well. Combating dating violence is a priority for OVW, as they support collaborative efforts to enhance teens' understanding of healthy relationships, help them identify signs of abuse and assist them in locating help services.

Panelist Kevin Jennings, the Assistant Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, will be speaking about why teen dating violence matters to the Department of Education and discuss school initiatives they are implementing to address this serious issue.

“Middle school is an important time in the development of an adolescent's view of what a healthy relationship should be,” says Jennings. “The importance of teaching healthy relationship skills early on is integral in the prevention of teen dating violence, which is far too prevalent and prevents far too many students from being able to focus on their education.”

The panel also includes James Mercy, Ph.D., Special Advisor for Strategic Directions in the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who will speak about a new initiative entitled “Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships,” a comprehensive community-wide teen dating violence prevention initiative.

The press briefing marks the coming together of the Family Violence Prevention Fund, Jewish Women International, Break the Cycle, MTV, Liz Claiborne Inc., the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships*, the Los Angeles Unified School District and Men Can Stop Rape in an effort to urge educators, communities and parents to address this issue, and stop domestic violence before it begins.

“The middle school years offer key moments for education and prevention,” says Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. “For most tweens and young teens, these are the years when transition to adulthood begins, new peer and social influences come into play, and jealousy, anger and pressure to conform are felt in powerful ways. This also often is the first time the behaviors they saw in their homes and families, and the lessons they have learned from peers and from popular culture, are manifested in their own relationships. As the national program office for *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships* and *That's Not Cool*, a national public education campaign to prevent teen dating abuse sponsored by the DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women, we are proud to be helping find new ways to send effective prevention messages to middle school youth.”

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Blue Shield of California Foundation are investing \$18 million in 11 communities across the country to identify and evaluate the most promising pathways to stop dating violence and abuse before it starts. *Start Strong* is the largest national initiative ever funded to target 11-14 year olds to promote healthy relationships as a way to prevent teen dating violence and abuse. Representatives from *Start Strong*, including a teen activist and survivor, will also be in attendance to highlight pioneering school policy initiatives and the importance of promoting healthy teen relationships in middle school.

Jewish Women International's domestic violence awareness and prevention programs are offered in communities throughout the United States and abroad. **Cantor Deborah Jacobson, a member of JWI's National Leadership Council and co-chair of the Youth Committee, will speak about the faith**

**community's important role in teen dating violence prevention and intervention, and how faith-based programming can complement existing community efforts to address this issue.**

**“Dating violence affects teens from all religions,” said Loribeth Weinstein, executive director of Jewish Women International. “Faith communities have the unique opportunity to raise the profile of this issue and to provide a safe space for teenagers to engage in education and open and honest conversation as a means to prevention.”**

#### **About Family Violence Prevention Fund**

*The Family Violence Prevention Fund works to end violence against women and children around the world, because every person has the right to live free of violence. The FVPF has continued to break new ground by reaching new audiences including men and youth, promoting leadership within communities to ensure that violence prevention efforts become self-sustaining, and transforming the way health care providers, police, judges, employers and others respond to violence. Its public education campaigns, conducted in partnership with The Advertising Council, have shaped public awareness and changed social norms for 15 years. For more information, visit [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org).*

#### **About Jewish Women International**

*Jewish Women International is the leading Jewish organization empowering women and girls through economic literacy, community training, healthy relationships education, and the proliferation of women's leadership. Our innovative programs, advocacy, and philanthropic initiatives protect the fundamental rights of all girls and women to live in safe homes, thrive in healthy relationships, and realize the full potential of their personal strength. For more information, please visit [www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org) or contact us at 800.343.2823.*

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