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**Helena Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Working Group Announce
Officer of the Year Winner**
Chief Justice McGrath to present the award Oct.26

Helena, MT – The Helena Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (DVSA) Working Group, along with The Friendship Center, is pleased to announce the recipient of the Officer of the Year award. The purpose of the award is to recognize the critical role law enforcement plays in serving victims of domestic and sexual violence in our community, and to highlight the role of uniformed officers in particular.

This year the DVSA Working Group chose to honor Officer McLean Peterson of the Helena Police Department for his exemplary work in the field of domestic and sexual violence. Officer Peterson received multiple nominations for going above and beyond in serving victims of abuse.

Officer Peterson has been a member of the Helena Police Department since December 2014. Jamie Gabrielli, The Friendship Center’s Senior Crisis Response Advocate, wrote in her nomination letter that Officer Peterson puts “forth great effort to serve victims and to make their plights less traumatizing.” Writing about her first interaction with Officer Peterson, Ms. Gabrielli noted how grateful the victim was for “Officer Peterson’s extra effort and compassion [which] helped her and her young child get through a very difficult night.”

Ms. Gabrielli states that while helping another victim, Officer Peterson was able to help in a timely and compassionate way. She states that “Knowing that there was an officer working on her behalf and truly caring what was going on with her situation was an enormous relief for this victim.” Officer Peterson “helped this woman feel heard and responded to the way victims need to be.”

Officer Peterson takes the time to recognize the victim’s needs and is willing to provide the additional support they need, notes Kody Ramler, The Friendship Center’s Residential Therapist and Client Care Director.

Chief Troy McGee of the Helena Police Department stated, "We would like to thank the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Working Group and The Friendship Center for recognizing Officer McLean Peterson with the Officer of the Year award. We are proud of

McLean's ability to interact with victims professionally and with empathy. McLean's receiving this award reflects positively on all members of the law enforcement community and their efforts to serve its citizens."

"A good experience with law enforcement can have such a positive impact on a victim's entire experience," says The Friendship Center Executive Director, Melinda Reed. "Highlighting the work of officers who make victims feel heard and supported is the least we can do as a community to say thanks for their help in addressing domestic and sexual violence."

The Officer of the Year award is an annual event for the DVSA Working Group in October as it is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The DVSA Working Group would like to recognize the other officers nominated this year: Deputy Sheriff Greg Homlund, LCSO; Deputy Sheriff Michael "Andy" Haegele, LCSO; Deputy Sheriff Don McCarthy, LCSO; Corporal Buck Herron, HPD; Senior Officer John Kaleczyc, HPD; Sergeant Don Skidmore, HPD. The DVSA Working Group is comprised of advocates, therapists, attorneys, law enforcement, educators, health workers and others.

Chief Justice McGrath will be presenting the award to the winner at the Mazurek Building at 215 North Sanders Street Wednesday, October 26, 2016 at 1:00 pm.