



## State of the State Address Fact Sheet: **Witness Protection Initiative**

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*"I will propose that we give our District Attorneys more help in protecting domestic violence victims, sexually exploited children, and witnesses who testify against violent criminals."*

-Governor Eliot Spitzer (January 9, 2008)

### **The Challenge**

- Crime victims, such as battered partners, sexually abused children and intimidated witnesses, are vital in fighting crime. These victims must be supported and protected. Other states have enacted witness protection legislation in response to high-profile murders of witnesses. New York should too, both to protect current witnesses and to encourage more to come forward.
- Police and District Attorneys are making headway in reducing violent crime, but the success of their efforts depends on witnesses coming forward with information and agreeing to testify. We know that a destructive "anti-snitch" campaign intimidates witnesses in some communities.

### **Our Approach**

- The Governor's proposal will provide additional funding to District Attorneys in protecting domestic violence victims, sexually exploited children and witnesses who testify against violent criminals. The Governor also will submit witness protection legislation, which will provide enhanced services and increase penalties for those who harass and intimidate witnesses.
- The Division of Criminal Justice Services is providing up to \$10,000 in matching funds to businesses and community groups that raise money to support "You Bet I Told," a Rochester-based initiative that encourages witnesses to report crimes to the police.
- The State will open two more Family Justice Centers, which provide comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence. These centers will join centers already established in Buffalo, Brooklyn and Orange County.

### **Related Initiatives**

- Through the Division of Criminal Justice Services, the state provided \$200,000 in witness protection resources to prosecutors' offices. For example, last fall the state provided funding to a small upstate District Attorney in order to protect a child sex-crime victim from the accused and an uncharged family member. The funding prevented additional trauma to the child and ensured that she would be confident to testify against her abuser.

- One of the greatest accomplishments of 2007 was the enactment of legislation that strengthened penalties for sex and labor human trafficking and provided assistance to victims.
- The State also provided funding for victim advocates in integrated domestic violence courts; and added State troopers to child advocacy centers, which provide support services to young victims of crime.