



Utah Domestic Violence Council

205 North 400 West • Salt Lake City, Utah 84103 • (801) 521-5544 • Fax (801) 521-5548

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Judy Kasten Bell, Executive Director

## Domestic violence deaths devastating—despite decline

**Contact:**

Judy Kasten Bell  
UDVC Executive Director  
(801) 521-5544 ext. 103  
(801) 920-1327 cell

Jerry Blackburn, Chair  
Utah Domestic Violence Council  
(801) 633-7258 cell

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(Salt Lake City, Utah) – Domestic violence related deaths continue to exact a tragic toll in Utah. According to the Utah Domestic Violence Council, 2007 closed with a total of 18 deaths. There were 17 domestic violence related deaths in 2002, when the Utah Domestic Violence Council began collecting data, 21 deaths in 2003, 23 in 2004, 33 in 2005, 27 in 2006, and 18 in 2007. “We hope these numbers will continue to drop,” said Jerry Blackburn, Chair of the Utah Domestic Violence Council, “and that’s why we keep working to increase public awareness and promote zero tolerance of domestic violence.”

While numbers have been higher in previous years, the trauma of losing a loved one to domestic violence cannot be diminished. Kara Hopkins, 15, was fatally shot, allegedly by boyfriend Parley Jeffs Dutson, 18, after refusing his demands to have sex in front of others at a party. Lynn A. Richards, 52, was shot several times by her husband, Daniel H. Richards, 55, before he apparently took his own life with a single shot. According to newspaper reports, Timothy McEnaney, 30, was gunned down in a crowded restaurant by his girlfriend’s ex-husband, Mark Erickson, 30.

Tragically, innocent children are often exposed to the violence. Erickson reportedly left his young daughter and step-daughter in his truck while he shot McEnaney, parking where the children could not see him “fight with their mother.” In another incident, three children ages 8, 9 and 12, watched as their mother, Monika Ann Dilmaghanian, 34, fatally stabbed her boyfriend, Nathan Harris, 42.

Domestic violence is also known as a hidden crime, but new technology is bringing some cold cases back into the spotlight. In 1996 Jamie Weiss, 18, was found drowned in a bathtub on the day before her wedding. An autopsy indicated the cause of death as blunt force trauma and asphyxiation. It took 11 years, but additional witnesses and new forensic

evidence resulted in the recent arrest of Jamie's fiancé, Billy Justin Charles, now 31. He has been charged with first degree felony murder.

It is crucial to recognize that domestic violence occurs in all communities, without respect to income, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual preference, age or disability. Domestic violence is a social ill that affects all society, and it must be stopped. "The family unit is the basic core of our society," Blackburn stated, "and we need to prevent, eliminate and treat family violence in all its forms."

Be aware of some critical warning signs: physical violence that increases in frequency and severity, threats with weapons or threats against your life, attempted strangulation, controlling behaviors, forced sex, threats of suicide, violence against children or animals, and violence outside the home. These represent serious risk factors.

Leaving can be a very dangerous time. Break the cycle of violence—tell someone. Get help by calling the Utah Domestic Violence Link Line at 1-800-897-LINK (5465). Work with an advocate to create a safety plan that can help you and your children seek safety. Remember, there is no excuse for abuse. End domestic violence by breaking the silence.

All information on domestic violence related deaths is gathered by the Utah Domestic Violence Council from public sources. Key report findings include:

- 5 cohabitant homicides
- 6 perpetrator suicides
- 2 dating relationship homicides
- 1 domestic violence related homicide
- 2 domestic violence related suicides
- 2 domestic violence related deaths
- 8 deaths involving firearms
- 5 children were present at 2 of the above listed deaths

Access additional information about domestic violence and view the full *Utah Domestic Violence Related Deaths 2007* report on the Utah Domestic Violence Council website at [www.udvc.org](http://www.udvc.org).