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GINNY MERRIAM, CITY OF MISSOULA, MONTANA
PUBLIC INFORMATION/COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE: 406.552.6007, gmerriam@ci.missoula.mt.us

Public Education Campaign Launches: It's Your Call — 911

City leaders, university officials and advocacy groups encourage sexual assault victims to call 911 for immediate assistance and information.

March 21, 2012 — Missoula, Mont. — Mayor John Engen, Missoula Police Chief Mark Muir and University of Montana Vice President for External Relations Jim Foley announce today the official launch of the public education campaign, It's Your Call — 911, to encourage victims of sexual assault and rape to call 911 for immediate assistance and access to information about victim resources.

"We want everyone to know that they can get immediate help and information about community resources when they call 911," said Mayor Engen. "The campaign is just the start of our public education efforts. We are implementing changes across agencies to make sure victims get access to services and care quickly and compassionately."

The public education campaign starts today with the launch of missoula911.com. The website provides information about the choices a victim has when he or she

calls 911, a listing of community and on-campus victim resources, and downloadable flyers that community and campus groups can post to encourage sexual assault and rape victims to call 911.

It's Your Call — 911 emphasizes that victims retain control of their situations while gaining immediate access to the resources they need, including emergency and nonemergency medical care, information about their options when they call 911, and access to sexual assault advocacy groups and counseling services in a single location.

"Calling 911 does not obligate victims to file an official police report or to press charges against their attackers, although those options are encouraged," said Missoula Police Chief Mark Muir. "It does, however, open doors to all victim services in the community, whether it is law enforcement or advocate and support resources."

"We encourage an immediate call to 911 as the safest and quickest way to access services, but we also understand that victims may hesitate to get help for a variety of complex reasons," added Muir. "It is never too late to call 911."

UM student group leaders are being contacted to encourage a campus-wide effort to educate students about the 911 campaign. The city will provide student groups with tools, including Facebook links and posters, to educate students about the importance of calling 911 when sexual assault or rape happens. Students will also see Facebook ads with a similar message.

"Students are stepping up to support the intolerance of sexual assault in the university community, and we want to encourage them to continue to have a voice. We ask their active support in educating their friends to call 911 for help and resources," said Foley, vice president for external relations at The University of Montana.

"The University of Montana is working with Mayor Engen, the Missoula Police Department and our own campus services to make sure that we are delivering a unified message, not only to victims, but to potential perpetrators to deter sexual assault in our community," he said.

Working Together

"Reducing sexual assault and rape is a community-wide effort, and several local entities are developing a joint response to these crimes," said Mayor Engen.

The Multidisciplinary Team — a group of law enforcement officers, prosecution officials, medical and health care providers, social services professionals and victim advocates — is working together to coordinate services more effectively.

911 protocol changes are under way to make sure services are provided as seamlessly as possible. Police have also developed a new policy for sexual assault investigations to reinforce that first responders place victims' safety and prompt access to services/information as the highest priorities.

In the coming months, public education efforts on The University of Montana campus and in the community will be expanded to raise awareness and discourage rape and sexual assault.

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Additional information in attached Sexual Assault Program Details document.

Additional contacts:

Mark Muir, Missoula Police Chief, 406-552-6316

Jim Foley, UM Vice President for External Relations, 406-243-2311

Jenny Daniel, Supervisor, Missoula Crime Victim Advocate Program, 406-830-3831