

Hi My name is Stevie, I'm a member of the community.

And hi my name is Heath, I'm a ThinkSelf DVSA advocate.

We are here to provide an ASL statement from Violence Free Minnesota–VFM–on the recent Burnsville police and EMT domestic violence homicides. We want to share that we are not CDIs, we just want to provide ASL access to our community so they can understand what recently happened.

Violence Free Minnesota, the statewide coalition to end relationship abuse, joins our community in mourning the two police officers and one EMT who responded to a domestic violence call in Burnsville on February 18, 2024. We grieve for their loved ones and acknowledge the enormous impact their deaths have on their families.

Adam Finseth, Paul Elmstrand, and Matthew Ruge will be included in our *2024 Intimate Partner Homicide Report* as the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th confirmed victims of intimate partner homicide in Minnesota in 2024.

Since 1989, Violence Free Minnesota is the only agency in Minnesota to capture the full scope of intimate partner homicide in our state. They seek to draw attention to the broader context of this tragedy, which requires a gendered analysis of violence overlooked by the media. For many hours, the suspect in this shooting felt he had the right to hold his female partner and his children hostage, causing incredible trauma to his family. And their experience, as well as the voices of domestic violence experts are largely being omitted from the news and media. The lives of a woman and seven children are forever changed. Several children witnessed the shooting, and some witnessed the suspect end his life. These are the stories that are not being shared.

This was not a targeted police attack. Adam Finseth, Paul Elmstrand, and Matthew Ruge were killed because a man barricading his family felt threatened by attempts to undermine his power and control over them. He was also legally prohibited from possessing a firearm, yet was found with several. Nearly every year in Minnesota and nationwide, men who kill their female partners overwhelmingly do so by firearm. This man allegedly had a history of domestic violence against multiple previous female partners, including violence so severe one woman stated she believed he would eventually kill her. And yet a court dismissed her allegations.

It's important that we understand that this shooting was preventable. Misogyny and firearms together are not safe. Not believing women is not safe. Not investing in Domestic Abuse Transformation Programming and prevention of abuse is not safe. When we talk about and share information about what just happened, but we ignore the reasons behind the violence, or we ignore the victims and survivors, we cause great harm.

For over 30 years, Violence Free Minnesota has documented intimate partner homicides in our annual

*Homicide Report: Relationship Abuse in Minnesota*. At least 830 victims, the vast majority of which were women, have been killed due to relationship abuse in our state since 1989. Since 2014, 261 people have been killed, and 46 of them were bystanders. Of those 46 bystanders, only four were police, including the two officers who were recently killed in Burnsville. Our goal is not to minimize those officers' deaths, but to expand public information about domestic violence in Minnesota, who it most impacts, and who is most in danger.

The Burnsville shooting comes on the heels of at least 39 lives lost due to relationship abuse in 2023; the highest number we have recorded since 1989, and many of those victims will never be recognized.

Every year we are frustrated because domestic violence causes so many deaths, but the community tends to stay quiet, and is not outraged. Again and again we ask for policy changes to help prevent these deaths, but no one in the system who claims to be angry and upset and recognizes these shootings will read the domestic violence homicide report, or attend the memorials, or invest in advocacy services. They often ignore survivors' safety as they are trying to keep themselves safe, and they refuse to discuss domestic violence shootings. Advocates try to raise awareness, but they still do not have enough funding. For the past 34 years, people are willing to name the victims, but not willing to recognize the women who suffer. Relationship abuse exists 365 days a year and deserves recognition.

We are calling attention to the community impact of domestic violence as a public health issue with extensive ripple effects. Our schools, hospitals, workplaces, places of worship, and neighborhoods are all impacted in some way. The families of the first responders and the families of the women and children are all affected. The circle of impact caused by domestic violence touches everyone. It goes through our entire community.

We also want to call attention to the incredible importance of community-based advocates, who work 24/7, 365 days a year to provide support to victim/survivors. Advocates are always willing to help, even when the systems refuse to be involved, when they have no funding, and when law enforcement and courts turn their back. It's important to recognize that Black and Indigenous leaders have long advocated for more options, not only law enforcement and court, but having plenty of options to choose from. When community-based advocacy is funded and used, survivor and community safety will improve, and domestic violence calls to police will decrease.

Adam Finseth, Paul Elmstrand, and Matthew Ruge lost their lives. And we mourn them. We call on our community, including the elected officials and reporters to ensure that the context of their homicides does not go unspoken and that the female survivors and children be granted the care and consideration they deserve. Achieving a violence free Minnesota demands that we name domestic violence when and where it occurs, and it remains a matter of community action before, during, and after tragedies like these—not only when first responders are killed in their attempts to assist.

If you would like more information, please contact us at ThinkSelf for clarification, or if there is anything you don't understand, please reach out to us.