



For Immediate Release

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Major Atlanta Organizations Join Forces with Atlanta Victim Assistance, Inc. to “Fight Identity Theft” as part of City-Wide Awareness Campaign

Atlanta City Council, Atlanta Police Department, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Atlanta and Governor’s Office of Consumer Affairs among stakeholders taking aim at growing threat

(Atlanta – August 17, 2009) -- Tackling one of the city’s fastest-growing crimes, Atlanta Victim Assistance, Inc. is mobilizing a coalition of local organizations to “Fight Identity Theft” as part of a high-profile public awareness campaign that will kick off **August 17th at 12 noon during a news conference at Atlanta City Hall.**

The campaign is the centerpiece of a federally-funded initiative dubbed Project SAFE, which aims to arm Atlantans with the information, tools and resources needed to combat identity theft

“Many different organizations have been working diligently to prevent identity theft,” said **Brenda Muhammad, executive director of AVA, which is marking its 25th anniversary this year.** “But we’ve realized that we can help more people by combining our efforts and that’s why we’re sending out a call to arms to the entire Atlanta community. AVA is ready to team up with any responsible partner who answers that call.”

As part of the “Fight Identity Theft” campaign, Project SAFE is unveiling a **series of eye-catching print ads, posters, radio PSAs and online materials** depicting real-life identity theft victims from different walks of life – all of whom are laced up in boxing gloves. Although AVA condemns violence, these onetime “victims” will explain in their own words how they emerged from their respective ordeals as “victors.”

In order to facilitate more “victor” stories, AVA is using Project SAFE as a vehicle to enlist other Atlanta service organizations, state agencies and community groups to work collectively. One tangible way these organizations will work together is through the initiative’s new web page, which will harness the collective resources of the various groups and serve as a one-stop shop for victims of identity theft in the city. www.atlantava.org/projectsafe

Funded by a 2008 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Project SAFE also deploys AVA staff and volunteers to assist residents in recovering their losses, repairing their credit histories and, in some cases, restoring their good names before the eyes of the law.

The campaign’s timing couldn’t be better: In 2008, **Georgia was ranked as the state with the 7th highest number of reported identity theft cases,** according to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission. The Atlanta Police Department are reporting incidents that run the gamut from individual attacks to coordinated activity involving well-organized, identity theft rings.





Statistics show that identity theft and identity fraud crimes exact a heavy toll on our national economy and overall quality of life. An independent 2007 survey found that roughly 9 million Americans were attacked by identity thieves who stole an average of \$5,720 per victim. That year, the total cost of those crimes was estimated at \$50 billion.

But there’s a little known, and disturbing statistic about identity theft: Roughly a third of the cases are never reported to the authorities. About **11 percent of identity theft cases go unreported because they involve friends or family members** who are reluctant to press charges against someone they know.

By collaborating with other organizations and individuals dedicated to deterring identity theft, AVA’s Project SAFE will better prepare consumers to protect themselves in the long run. Toward that end, local organizations that have agreed to partner with Project SAFE have signed a letter of commitment and are demonstrating their support in a number of ways:

- **MARTA**, the regional transit system, has agreed to run Project SAFE public service advertisements on its buses, trains and in train stations
- The **Atlanta Urban League** will distribute Project SAFE campaign materials to thousands of clients who use the organization’s services for employment, education and training
- The **Atlanta Police Department** will hold training sessions for community organizers and residents across the city to teach them pro-active steps they can take to prevent identity theft
- **Georgia Watch**, a prominent consumer watchdog group, will recruit volunteers and place a link from its website directing visitors to the Project SAFE web page that’s loaded with helpful information about identity theft

To date, Project SAFE partners include **AARP of Georgia, Atlanta City Council, Atlanta Police Department, The Atlanta Urban League, Cascade United Methodist Church, Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Greater Atlanta, Fulton Atlanta Community Action Authority, Georgia Department of Human Services, Georgia Watch, Glymph and Associates, the Governor’s Office of Consumer Affairs, Hadassah of Atlanta, MARTA, Representative Rob Teilheit, Swing! Magazine and WSB-AM.**

To find out more about Project SAFE or for media assistance, please contact Lyle V. Harris of Mustard Seed Communications at 404 441-7554 or at lylevincentharris@gmail.com. You can also visit the Project SAFE web page at www.atlantava.org/projectsafe.

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