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Editorial: SC domestic violence trend is hopeful but problem is still with us

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF
SEP 24, 2020 UPDATED 2 HRS AGO



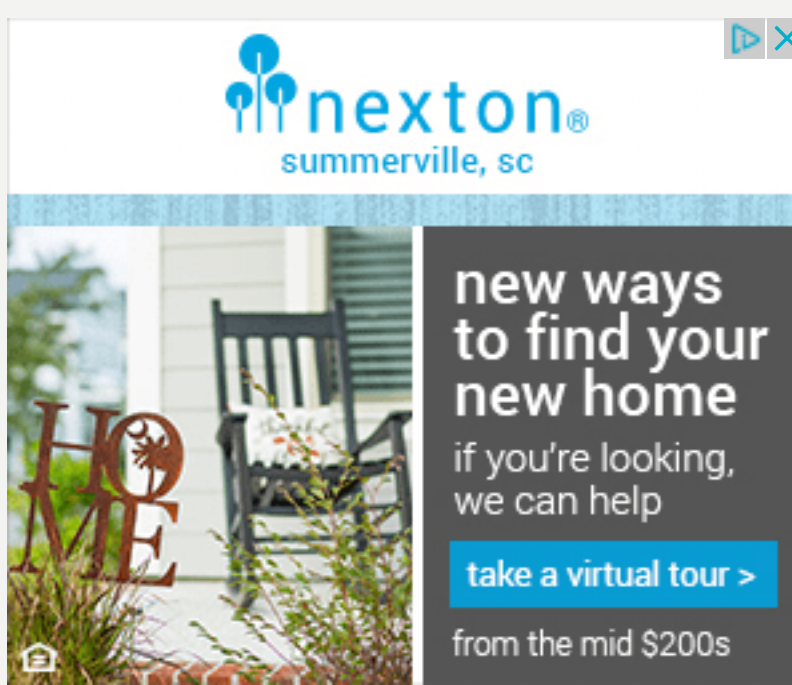
South Carolina has moved off the Top 10 list for states with the highest rates of domestic violence deaths but now, at No. 11, much work is left to be done. STOCK PHOTO

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The fact that South Carolina dropped out of the Top 10 worst states for women killed by men is a positive sign. Any progress in moving down that shameful and heartbreaking list worth noting.

South Carolina is No. 11 on the Violence Policy Center's list released this week, marking the first time the Palmetto State has not been in the Top 10 since national researchers began tracking data in 1996, The Post and Courier's Sara Coello reported.

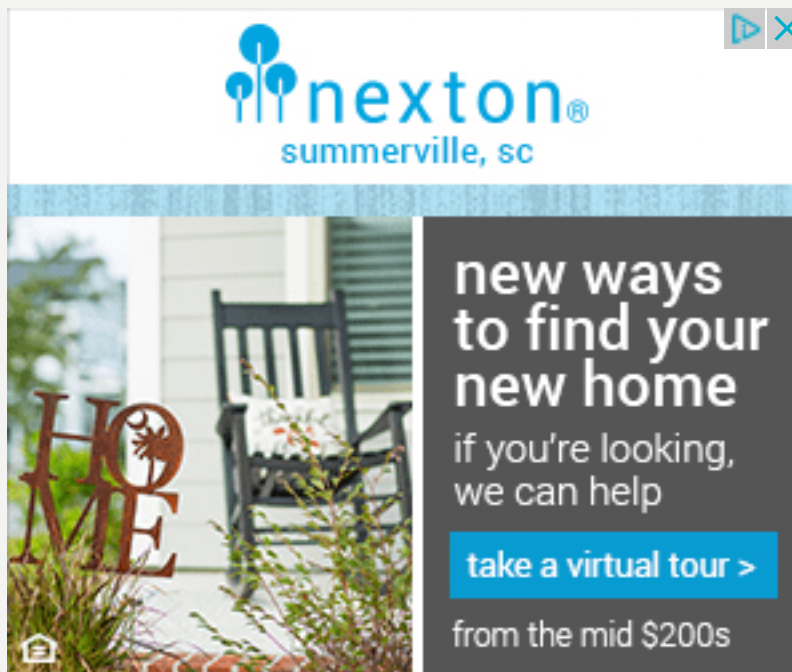
"I have very guarded optimism. I hope that's the beginning of us continuing to go lower," Sara Barber, executive director of the S.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, told Ms. Coello.



South Carolina topped the list four times between 2000 and 2015, so the trend is a hopeful sign that perhaps South Carolina is making progress against the scourge of domestic violence.

But let's face it: We shouldn't be proud of being No. 11 in the country because it means women are still being killed by men — and the rate is still alarming. That ranking represents the deaths of 44 women in 2018. The tragic toll doesn't include the children, parents, siblings and others who were left behind to deal with the grief and pain that come with losing a loved one, especially to violence. The state's rate of 1.68 in every 100,000 women killed by men also remains above the national average of 1.28.

These and other facts demonstrate that there is a lot of work left to do, even with the improved ranking.



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"While on the surface this seems encouraging, this is not a reason to reduce our efforts," Ms. Barber wrote in an op-ed on today's Commentary page. "On the contrary, the state's sustained high ranking underscores an ongoing and significant problem."

The rankings put together by the Violence Policy Center are based on 2018 statistics, which means we don't have a truly accurate picture of what's happening today. There is justifiable fear that massive job losses and other issues related to the pandemic have exacerbated domestic abuse.

The annual report also showed a troubling nationwide disparity as black women were three times as likely as white women to be killed by men. Intimate partner violence is the leading cause of premature death for black women ages 15 to 24, Ms. Coello reported.

Part of the solution is changing our mindset about domestic violence to realize it's not just a criminal justice problem. It's a cultural and societal issue that demands multifaceted solutions, including robust prevention, support and education programs. There also needs to be greater awareness of these programs so women know where to turn for help.

The state's improved ranking could be a sign that some of the reforms spurred by The Post and Courier series, "Till Death Do Us Part," are beginning to show results. Those changes included harsher punishments and the loss of gun ownership rights for many of those convicted of domestic violence, and the addition of dozens of prosecutors to handle domestic violence cases in lower-level courts.

But clearly the work to end domestic violence is not finished. And it won't be until South Carolina is a safer place for all women.

MORE INFORMATION

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