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## First Lady Mary Pat Christie Recognizes Cathy Stephens of Jersey Battered Women's Service as 7th New Jersey Hero of 2015

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**Trenton, NJ** - Experiencing firsthand the traumatic effects of domestic violence on families, Cathy Stephens has become a champion for thousands of abuse victims over the past 25 years. Today, First Lady Mary Pat Christie is honoring the director of client services for Jersey Battered Women's Service (JBWS) in Morristown as her 7<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Hero of 2015 and 38<sup>th</sup> Hero overall. Stephens was one of three New Jersey residents nominated for their efforts to educate, heal and empower domestic abuse victims. Mary Houtsma, founding director of the Essex County Family Justice Center in Newark and Sandra Ramos, founder and executive director of Strengthen our Sisters in Wanaque also were October New Jersey Heroes candidates.

"At the young age of 10, Cathy witnessed violence in her own home. Since then, she has become a passionate advocate on behalf abuse victims in Morris County," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "That commitment has translated into the development of some of the most comprehensive client services for victims, their children and even abusers. I am proud and greatly inspired by Cathy and the work being done at JBWS that is helping to break the cycle of domestic violence and help families rebuild their lives. I am honored to name Cathy Stephens as our 38<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Hero."

For nearly four decades, Jersey Battered Women's Service, Inc. has worked diligently to protect victims of domestic violence and their families. The Morris County-based agency serves more than 20,000 people through its residential services, community counseling and legal advocacy, professional training, community outreach and education, and a batterers' program. JBWS' director of client services Cathy Stephens has been instrumental in developing and leading many of these programs during her 25 years with the organization. She joined JBWS in 1990 and has been a social worker for over 35 years.

"I am so honored to be receiving this award," said Cathy Stephens. "I am especially proud to accept it on behalf of the Jersey Battered Women's Service and the many families we serve. This work is very rewarding, but comes with its challenges. I am grateful to First Lady Mary Pat Christie for recognizing New Jersey's domestic violence advocates as true heroes."

As director of client services, Cathy Stephens is intimately involved in JBWS services, from hotline and shelter to counseling, legal advocacy and children's programming. She is a leader in program innovation, having designed and opened JBWS' nationally recognized transitional housing center, and more recently, planning and preparing for the opening of Morris' Family Justice Center in March 2016. She has developed strong relationships with essential community partners, allowing JBWS to improve the community's responsiveness and ability to help victims become survivors.

Domestic abuse is a repetitive pattern of behaviors, including- physical abuse, sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation -utilized to maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

In New Jersey, there were 64,556 domestic violence offenses reported by the police in 2013, a 1 percent decrease compared to the 65,060 reported in 2012, according to a 2013 report on domestic violence prepared by the New Jersey State Police. Wives were the victims in 16 percent (10,158) and ex-wives were the victims in 3 percent (2,167) of the reported domestic violence offenses in 2013. Overall, females were victims in 75 percent (48,305) of all domestic violence offenses. Additionally, children were involved or present during 30 percent of all domestic violence offenses occurring in 2013.

Cathy Stephens is the fifth New Jersey determined by the public via an online poll posted to the New Jersey Heroes website. Nearly 5,000 votes were cast this week.

For more information on JBWS, please visit [www.jbws.org](http://www.jbws.org).

New Jersey Heroes is an initiative First Lady Mary Pat Christie began in 2010 to showcase the positive and unique ways people and organizations are impacting New Jersey and their communities. To nominate a hero, go to [newjerseyheroes.org](http://newjerseyheroes.org) and follow the application instructions to submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.

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