



**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT**

PROCLAMATION

**“SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS & PREVENTION MONTH”
“REFORM THE NORM!”**

WHEREAS, Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month calls attention to misconceptions and misinformation about sexual assault. Harmful attitudes allow these crimes to persist and survivors to be re-victimized, and the importance of each of us speaking out against it, in order to change attitudes which, allow sexual assault to persist; and

WHEREAS, sexual assault, at its core, is a devastating abuse of power- one that affects people of every age, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic levels, abilities, religions, backgrounds, and beliefs. It includes physical, verbal, visual, emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, financial, and technological abuse; and can occur between intimate partners, family members, friends, acquaintances, and strangers; and

WHEREAS, victims of sexual assault have a higher risk of experiencing a multitude of mental health conditions; Studies show Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is seven times higher in victims of sexual violence 1. Depression is 2.7 times greater, anxiety four times greater and drug-alcohol misuse six times greater 2. Victims are 3.5 times greater to have suicidal thoughts than those who have not experienced violence 3.; and

WHEREAS, COVID has exacerbated the already harrowing challenges facing sexual assault survivors by making it more difficult for them to seek help. As we race to stop the spread of this devastating virus, we must strengthen our efforts to support sexual assault survivors whose suffering may be compounded by this pandemic, as well as by the economic crisis that has further undermined their economic security and taken a toll on service providers; and

WHEREAS, we also must recognize that sexual assault was already a public health crisis even before the pandemic struck. Research has revealed a strong link between sexual violence and chronic disease, as well as greater long-term economic burdens on survivors of sexual assault 4. The trauma of assault is further compounded by the high costs of medical and mental health care, navigating the criminal justice system, and lost productivity; and

WHEREAS, Our Samoan women often are silenced about the abuse due to shame, disgrace, and embarrassment it will bring to the family, leaving themselves to be re-traumatized from repeated sexual abuse or/and suffer silently from depression and anxiety that can lead to attempted suicide; and

WHEREAS, it is the responsibility of each of us to stand up and speak out against it, not only to improve services available to survivors, but also to change the culture and attitudes that allow sexual assault to proliferate; and

WHEREAS, together as a community we can REFORM THE NORM engaging in meaningful dialogue, educate ourselves and others, work towards prevention of sexual violence at its root causes, continue our coordinated community efforts, and hold offenders accountable; and

WHEREAS, the principles of fa'asamoa do not condone acts of violence against members of family or anyone, instead our fa'asamoa should be our guide which prevention and intervention approaches are addressed with key concepts such as sacred spaces of covenantal relationships between family members, respect where behavior and language honors sacred spaces in relationships, family where sacred spaces are preserved and protected, and selfless love; and

WHEREAS, During Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month, the American Samoa Alliance Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, American Samoa Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, American Samoa Community Cancer Coalition, American Samoa Community College, American Samoa Office of the Governor, American Samoa Legal Aid, American Samoa Department of Legal Affairs, Back on Track, Catholic Social Services, Office of the Congress Woman, American Samoa Department of Education, American Samoa Department of Public Health, American Samoa Department of Human & Social Services, American Samoa Department of Public Safety, American Samoa Department of Youth & Womens Affairs, Empowering Pacific Island Communities (EPIC), IMPACT & Queers Tiers, Intersections Inc., LBJ Tropical Medical Center, Mana Community Support Services, Office of Protection & Advocacy for the Disabled, Society Of Faafafines In American Samoa (SOFIAS), American Samoa Territorial Administration on Aging, American Samoa Office of Veterans Affairs, and other community/government agencies along with numerous individuals are committed to eliminating sexual violence in our community. A collaboration that will focus on prevention and awareness on sexual violence, to strengthen the response in American Samoa.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LEMANU P. S. MAUGA, Governor of the Territory of American Samoa, do hereby proclaim the Month of April 2022 as Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month. I join advocates, the American Samoa Alliance against Domestic & Sexual Violence, partners, and the community of American Samoa in taking action to prevent sexual violence. I urge all of American Samoa to support victims when they reach out and disclose abuse. April is Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month and each day of the year is an opportunity to create change for the future.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto affixed my signature and the Seal of my office on this 10th day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-two.


~~LEMANU P. S. MAUGA~~
Governor