

POLICY LEADERS CAN HELP END THE CYCLE OF SILENCE

Most victims of sexual assault do not report the crime to law enforcement. Many never tell anyone. Then because so few assaults are reported – most perpetrators walk free.

It's time to end this cycle. As a policymaker, you can take the lead in your community.

WHAT IS START BY BELIEVING?

Start by Believing is a public awareness campaign designed to end the cycle of silence and change the way we respond to sexual assault. It was first launched in April 2011. Since then, thousands of professionals across the country and around the world have made their own personal commitment. This includes many policymakers such as yourself:



Mayor Buddy Dyer
Orlando, Florida

But it's more than just a personal pledge. By transforming personal and professional responses to sexual assault, we can help victims pursue justice and healing.

Failed responses... additional victims.

Stop the cycle and make our communities safer.



WHY IS THE PLEDGE IMPORTANT?

Decades of research demonstrates that sexual assault victims are often doubted or blamed, and these negative responses have a number of harmful effects. They also decrease the chance that victims will report the crime and reach out for help.

This is why the message of Start by Believing is so vital - outcomes will only change when sexual assault reports are investigated from an initial presumption of merit.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR POLICY LEADERS?

When a policy leader makes the pledge to Start by Believing, it demonstrates to community members and responding professionals that victims are to be treated with compassion and respect, and that all reports of sexual assault are to be handled professionally and fairly – instead of communicating the message that they are not believed. When the message comes from the top, it trickles down into daily actions that have a powerful impact on the community. Your strong leadership will encourage others in your community to do the right thing.

When Utah State Representative Angela Romero sponsored a resolution in 2015 to declare the first Wednesday in April, Start by Believing day in Utah, she led the way for other states to follow. In 2016, we built on that momentum by declaring the first ever global Start by Believing Day. Over a hundred communities participated, including numerous mayors, city council members, and other public officials. Now it's your turn. Join the movement, and transform the way your community responds to sexual assault.

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TAKE THE PLEDGE

Start by making your own personal commitment to Start by Believing.

- I pledge to Start by Believing when someone tells me about their sexual assault.
- I pledge to help survivors on the road to justice and healing.
- I pledge to help end the cycle of silence.

[Pledge now](#)



SPREAD THE WORD

Then share the message with others. We have all the tools you need. Check out our [personal action kit](#) and [community action kit](#) to learn how to get started.

Formally proclaim that your city/county/state is a Start by Believing community. To make it easy, we have a [proclamation](#) template ready for you.



Shasta County, California
Board of Supervisors



Announce your commitment with a press conference: Follow the example of Denver, Colorado, where their event was a true representation of what multidisciplinary collaboration looks like. Participants included Mayor Michael B. Hancock's office, the Denver District Attorney's Office, the Denver Department of Public Safety, the Denver Police Department, the Denver Sheriff Department, the Denver Fire Department, Denver Health Medical Center, the Sexual Assault Interagency Council, and The Blue Bench (a community-based sexual assault advocacy program). Also featured was a [young male survivor and his mother](#).

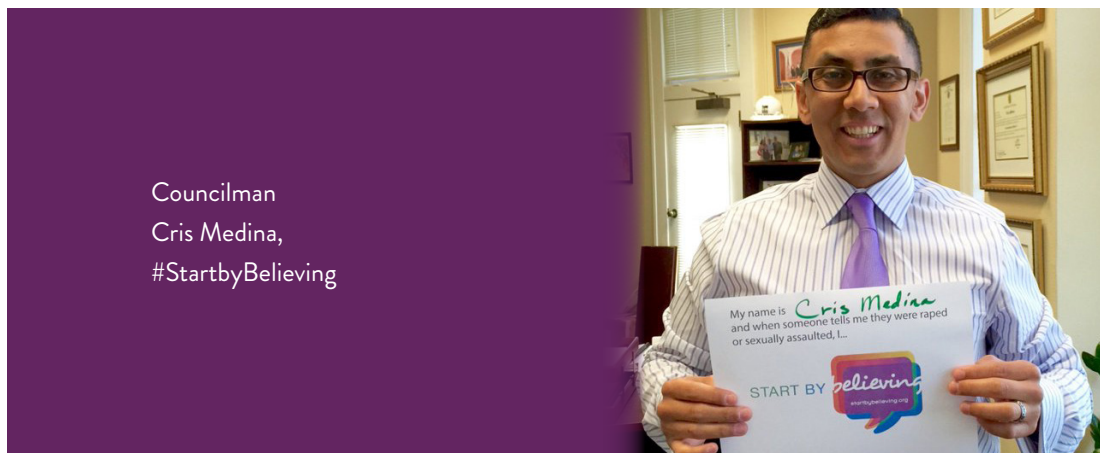
Reach out to local media outlets: To announce your leadership in bringing this important message to your community, consider connecting with local media outlets, such as this coverage in [Ramsey County Minnesota](#).

Use creative marketing to reach thousands: In Denver, the campaign message was prominently displayed on three billboards throughout the city, as well as 50 bus shelter advertisements, and 20 Yellow Cab displays. An additional 2,000 Yellow Cabs had bumper stickers proclaiming the Start by Believing message.

Yellow cab displays



Use social media: Let your virtual audience know about your commitment to Start by Believing, just like Councilman Cris Medina, San Antonio District 7 did. And don't forget to use #StartbyBelieving.



Want some help? Give us a call or send an email to info@startbybelieving.org. We're here to help your community join the hundreds of others transforming our response to sexual assault. Thank you for becoming a Start by Believing ally!

