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Denver Police Department  
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## Denver Pledges to Believe Victims of Sexual Assault *Start by Believing Campaign Enters Fifth Year*

**DENVER** – With April designated as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock, Denver District Attorney Beth McCann, Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen, and The Blue Bench Executive Director Karmen Carter came together today to pledge to Start by Believing victims of sexual assault. The Start by Believing campaign educates the community to believe victims of sexual assault – just as they would if someone told them their car was stolen. By visiting, [denvergov.org/startbybelieving](http://denvergov.org/startbybelieving), community members can learn how best to respond when someone tells them of their assault. They can then join the national Start by Believing movement by joining city leaders in taking the pledge.

“Believing victims of sexual assault is important and necessary to ensure our friends, family and loved ones can begin their road to recovery,” Mayor Hancock said. “The Start by Believing campaign not only gives us tools to prepare for those conversations, it lets victims know that there are people ready and willing to support them and lift them up, because we started by believing them.”

Sadly, it is likely that everyone knows someone who was or will be sexually assaulted. The first and most important thing a person can do to help is start by believing. If a victim is met with doubt or blame when expressing that he or she was sexually assaulted, it decreases the likelihood that person will report their assault to law enforcement, seek medical attention, or receive support to heal.

“Sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes in the United States. Too often victims do not report due to fear, embarrassment, or trauma while others fear retaliation, worry about media attention, or lack faith in our justice system,” said Denver District Attorney McCann. “That is why it is so important that we start by believing the person who says he or she was sexually assaulted. By believing, my office can then build a case that holds offenders accountable for their crimes while also treating survivors with respect and dignity.”

“The Start by Believing campaign is important to ensure victims of sexual assault are met with respect and dignity, not blame and doubt,” said Chief Pazen. “I am incredibly grateful for everyone in our community already supporting victims of sexual assault, those who are taking the pledge to start by believing, and our community and media partners who have generously stepped up to help spread the word about this issue.”

Max Media Denver will air public service announcements for the month of April on Jammin 101.5 and FLO 107.1, Lamar Advertising and Outdoor Promotions LLC donated space for campaign ads to run on billboards and bus shelters, and *Westword* continues to publish Start by Believing ads.

Also, the Denver City and County Building (first week of April) and the Pepsi Center (tonight after the Denver Nuggets' game) join the effort to bring awareness of the Start by Believing campaign by being illuminated in the Start by Believing campaign color, teal.

"It is so important for the community to understand that it is never easy for someone to share that they have been sexually assaulted," said Karmen Carter. "As a friend or family member, the most important thing we can say is 'I believe you.' This can lessen the survivor's sense of isolation and offer them the opportunity to reach out for support and consider engaging in the criminal justice system with a sense that others will believe them, as well."

Resources include:

- [www.Denvergov.org/StartbyBelieving](http://www.Denvergov.org/StartbyBelieving)
- [www.SeekthenSpeak.org](http://www.SeekthenSpeak.org) for resources for victims/survivors
- [The Blue Bench](#) - Sexual Assault Hotline - 303-322-7273
- [Denver Health Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners](#) or at 303-602-3007

In its fifth year, Denver's Start by Believing campaign is a collaborative effort between the Denver Police Department, Denver District Attorney's Office, Sexual Assault Interagency Council, and The Blue Bench. The Start by Believing campaign was developed by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI).

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