



# DEBRA BOWEN

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### Secretary of State Bowen Welcomes Additional Protections for Victims on Eve of Domestic Violence Awareness Month

**SACRAMENTO** – As Domestic Violence Awareness Month approaches, Secretary of State Debra Bowen today applauded the governor’s signing of Assembly Bill 2304 (Plescia), which ensures California’s Safe at Home program participants are protected from publication of their name changes in any public forum, including the Internet.

“It’s critical that victims of sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence have the ability to change their names and start their lives again without fear of being found,” said Secretary Bowen, whose office oversees the Safe at Home program, which offers confidential mail forwarding, voter registration, school records suppression, and other services to many victims of stalking, abuse, and sexual assault, and reproductive health care staff, volunteers, and patients. “That’s why I was proud to sponsor AB 2304 and happy to see it receive bipartisan support.”

Thanks to Senate Bill 1743 by then-Senator Bowen, it is already illegal to publish name-change information in newspapers in cases where the petitioner is a Safe at Home participant. However, existing law is silent on the publication of confidential name-change information on the Internet. This jeopardizes a victim’s ability to remain anonymous during the name-change process and puts the victim in danger of being located by his or her abuser.

AB 2304 protects participants in the Safe at Home program who petition for a change of name by clarifying that their confidential name-change information shall not be published by any means or in any public forum, including a hard copy or an electronic copy.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month in California. Domestic violence is the most common cause of injury to American women between the ages of 15 and 44. It crosses ethnic, racial, national origin, gender, socioeconomic, age, sexual orientation, and religious lines. Besides the obvious human toll it takes, domestic violence also strains the health and welfare systems, and is a leading contributor to homelessness.

Established in 1999, the Safe at Home program has served over 4,000 people by working with enrolling agencies such as district attorneys’ offices, health clinics, and women’s shelters to protect the identities of eligible program participants.

Twenty-eight states have confidential mail-forwarding programs but California’s more extensive Safe at Home is widely considered a national model. For more information about Safe at Home and a county-by-county list of enrolling agencies, visit <http://www.sos.ca.gov/safeathome/>.

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