

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**\*Wednesday, August 15, 2012 – Houston Area Women’s Center, 1010 Waugh Dr., Room 202, Houston, Texas\***

### **Free Legal Line for Sexual Assault Victims Unveils in Harris County**

**Houston** – Wednesday, August 15, Sexual Assault Legal Services and Assistance, also known as SALSA, will unveil its new legal line for sexual assault victims at a 10 am press conference at the Houston Area Women’s Center, Room 202. Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis and Rebecca White, CEO of HAWC, together with sexual assault survivor Lorin Leatherwood, will address the media. Torie Camp, Deputy Director of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, will emcee the event.

SALSA is a free and confidential legal line that was established to address the over-looked ramifications of sexual assault and to ensure that a victim’s legal needs don’t go unrecognized or unmet. “Legal services and resources are available and accessible to help restore a victim’s life after an attack, whether it happened two days ago or two years ago – all they have to do is call the legal line,” said Torie Camp, TAASA Deputy Director. “Both the legal line, 1-888-343-4414, and website at [hopelaws.org](http://hopelaws.org) are up and running. We are open for business Monday through Friday, 8 am until 5 pm, and we’re ready to take more calls.”

19,007 sexual assaults were reported by Texans in 2010. According to a report from the Texas Department of Public Safety, 2129 of those assaults were reported to Harris Country Police Departments. However, because of rampant underreporting, the actual number of sexual assaults in Texas and Harris County is significantly higher.

“Sexual assault survivors need to know that they are not alone,” said Leatherwood. “They need to know that when they do reach out for help, there will be someone on the receiving end who cares and who can help. And the SALSA attorneys on the receiving end of this legal line do care

and they can help. Legal services and resources are available to help restore the lives of victims after an attack; all they have to do is call. I wish there was a program like this around when I needed it.”

Lorin Leatherwood was sexually assaulted when she was 15 years old by an acquaintance and now advocates and speaks on behalf of sexual assault victims. Her experience as a survivor has given her the impetus to encourage other women and men to reach out to programs like SALSA and local rape crisis centers like the Houston Area Women’s Center.

“Every year, the Houston Area Women’s Center helps hundreds of sexual assault survivors through its crisis and counseling programs,” said CEO White. “Often, though, assault victims have other problems resulting from sexual violence that the police department, advocate, or counselor isn’t designed to help with. An act of sexual violence can be devastating and impacts multiple aspects of a survivor’s life – safety, privacy, finances, education, employment, and housing – often requiring legal assistance. Sexual Assault Legal Services and Assistance can address those often overlooked legal needs.”

SALSA’s press conference coincides with the debut of multiple billboards and advertisements around Harris County which promote its legal line. Assistance and information can also be accessed on the SALSA website – [www.hopelaws.org](http://www.hopelaws.org).

In addition to outreach efforts in Houston, SALSA attorneys also facilitated a recent June training entitled Civil Legal Remedies for Sexual Assault Survivors. Over 20 legal professionals and advocates from the Houston area were in attendance and are now prepared to partner with SALSA attorneys to meet the legal needs of the men and women from Harris County who call for help.

“The purpose behind today’s conference is of great concern to me, which is why I am happy to help introduce and promote this new state-wide initiative,” said Senator Ellis. “I have no doubt SALSA will be a great legal resource to residents in Houston and across Texas. Please partner with us and spread the word about this new legal line for sexual assault survivors.”

*Founded by a federal grant from the United States Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, SALSA is a project of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault and the Texas Legal Services Center, both based in Austin.*