**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** **Denise Rotheimer 847-406-8566**

**PRESS CONFERENCE – DIGNITY FOR ALL ACT**

**Friday, August 25, 2017 at 11:00 a.m.**

**Lake County Courthouse**

**18 N. County Road, Waukegan, IL**

Ingleside, Illinois - Founding executive director, Denise Rotheimer of Mothers On a Mission to Stop Violence announces her federal legislative proposal to enact the Dignity for All Act in honor of Pravin Varuguse, a 19-year-old Southern Illinois University student who went missing for five days until he was found dead in February 2014. “This federal legislative proposal, which is currently being considered by Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky is critical for the enforcement of crime victims’ rights in every state across the nation,” says Rotheimer. Rotheimer will be joined by Pravin’s mother Lovely Varughese to raise awareness of her experience as a crime victim and garner national support for the Dignity for All Act to prevent crime victims from becoming further victimized by the system. The Dignity for All Act seeks to provide crime victims with legal representation to enforce their rights at no cost to crime victims or additional cost to taxpayers by using existing funds in the Crime Victims Compensation Act.

Crime victims in Illinois are denied equal protection under the laws in comparison to defendants who are entitled to receive the appointment of legal representation to enforce their rights. “In November 2014, the Illinois Constitution’s Crime Victims’ Bill of Rights Act was amended by prohibiting the court from appointing attorneys to crime victims. This amendment has been dubbed as ‘Marsy’s Law.’ As a result of the passage of Marsys’ Law, the State of Illinois only provides crime victims who are of financial means with the right to retain legal representation in the criminal case. This disparity puts crime victims at risk of becoming further victimized by the system and is the reason why I authored legislation in the Illinois General Assembly to provide crime victims with legal representation to enforce their rights at no cost or additional cost to taxpayers,” says Rotheimer.

Lake County State’s Attorney Michael Nerheim supported Rotheimer’s Bill when it was filed in the Illinois State Senate in 2015. “I believe that SB2151 will have multiple benefits to the citizens of Illinois. First, any crime victim who has retained counsel will help maintain a cooperative effort among the victim, his or her counsel, and the prosecutor to ensure that each victim’s rights are strictly enforced. The duty of a prosecutor is to seek justice and we represent the People of the State of Illinois, not solely crime victims," said Nerheim. "Secondly, this legislation will have the positive effect of encouraging victims to step forward and report their crimes to law enforcement. It is my belief that SB2151 will ensure participation of crime victims in the criminal justice process and guarantee the dignity of all citizens victimized in the State of Illinois," says State’s Attorney Nerheim.

“We have seen the worst and the best of the judicial system in the past 3 ½ years. Our son was treated with no dignity by some of the officials who have taken the oath to serve and protect. He was blamed for his own death since he is not here to defend himself. The fact that a family could not grieve their loss, but had to commission a second autopsy and fight the system since the moment he was found is appalling. Every human, whether living or deceased, should be treated with respect and dignity. We don’t want our son’s death to go in vain. His life would be honored if we are able to shed some light onto the problems in the judicial system and the way the families are treated. We are hoping to pass “the Dignity for All Act” in honor of our son Pravin,” says Lovely Varughese.