Recently former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice was in the news again when a New Jersey court dismissed the domestic violence charge against him following his completion of a pre-trial intervention program. Also this week, defensive end Ray McDonald was arrested on charges of domestic violence and child endangerment, and subsequently released from his contract with the Chicago Bears. However, McDonald's initial domestic violence arrest in 2014—while he was playing for the San Francisco 49ers—never resulted in charges filed.

The Atlantic City police and prosecutor's response raised serious questions about how the criminal justice system approaches the crime of domestic violence based on their criminal justice intervention in the Ray Rice case. “The criminal justice system has essentially sent a message that perpetrators of domestic violence will not be held accountable for their crimes. When this happens victims don’t feel safe to come forward because they don’t trust the system. The effects of the Ray Rice dismissal will be felt by victims across the country,” says Melissa Scaia, executive director of DAIP. The cases of Rice and McDonald tell many victims that law enforcement agencies and prosecutors don't treat domestic violence as seriously as other crimes. This message silences and isolates far too many victims. Board Chair of DAIP and former deputy police chief of the city of Duluth John Beyer states, “We owe it to victims to improve the criminal justice response to these crimes. Police and prosecutors make every effort to ensure victims’ safety and to hold offenders accountable to the fullest extent possible in Duluth. ‘The Duluth Model’ works because it prioritizes victims while holding perpetrators accountable.”

The Duluth Model’s "Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence," a partnership between Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP), and criminal justice agencies of the City of Duluth and St. Louis County, was named world’s best policy for Ending Violence against Women and Girls in 2014 from UN Women and the World Future Council. In January of 2015 Duluth was one of only four cities in the U.S. to create a Blueprint for Safety, a project of the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. Learn how to organize a Duluth Model CCR in your community at one of our trainings. Our next one is in Duluth September 15-18, 2015.

A community using the Duluth Model approach:
- Has taken the blame off the victim and placed the accountability for abuse on the offender.
- Has shared policies and procedures for holding offenders accountable and keeping victims safe across all agencies in the criminal and civil justice systems from 911 to the courts.
- Prioritizes the voices and experiences of women who experience battering in the creation of those policies and procedures.
- Believes that battering is a pattern of actions used to intentionally control or dominate an intimate partner and actively works to change societal conditions that support men’s use of tactics of power and control over women.
- Offers change opportunities for offenders through court-ordered educational groups for batterers.
- Has ongoing discussions between criminal and civil justice agencies, community members and victims to close gaps and improve the community’s response to battering.

This approach to tackling violence against women has inspired violence protection law implementation and the creation of batterer intervention programs in the United States and around the world, including in countries such as Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Australia.

More information on "the Duluth Model" can be found at http://www.theduluthmodel.org