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Domestic violence murders rise as crime falls in Florida

By **Jamal Thalji**, Times Staff Writer
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TALLAHASSEE — Crime was down in Florida and throughout much of Tampa Bay in the first half of 2010, according to statistics released Tuesday by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

However, those numbers also show a rise in murders in Florida — especially killings linked to domestic violence.

That's why state officials also announced Tuesday a pilot program in Manatee and Sarasota counties aimed at helping victims of domestic violence get on their feet economically.

The Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation said it will fund the job training and placement program with \$500,000 in federal money. The goal: help domestic violence victims achieve financial independence so they're not forced to stay in abusive homes.

Tuesday's numbers reflect crimes reported to Florida's law enforcement agencies in the first six months of 2010 compared with that period in 2009.

They show that murders rose about 4 percent, going from 470 deaths in 2009 to 487 this year. But domestic violence murders were up about 6 percent — or five more lives lost this year. Domestic violence murders have totaled to 91 so far this year.

The total number of reported crimes in Florida dropped 5 percent, and FDLE Commissioner Gerald Bailey said Tuesday that he doesn't expect that trend to change for the rest of 2010.

"We know that these first six months are an indicator of what the year should look like," Bailey said. "We're optimistic that this downward trend will continue."

Statewide robberies and vehicle thefts were both down 17 percent — 2,633 fewer robberies and 4,360 fewer thefts this year.

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Public Safety: Crime

- Domestic violence murders rise as crime falls in Florida

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Despite budget cuts, most of Tampa Bay's law enforcement agencies reported drops in the volume of crime in 2010.

Crime was down 13 percent overall in Hillsborough County.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office reported a 12 percent drop and the Tampa Police Department saw an 11 percent decline.

Police Chief Jane Castor praised her department's aggressive tactics. "We have reduced the number of crime victims in our city by adopting a mentality that there is no such thing as a minor crime in Tampa," she said.

Pinellas County saw an 8 percent drop. The St. Petersburg Police Department reported a 14 percent fall and the Clearwater Police Department saw a 6 percent decrease.

Hernando County saw a 6 percent decline. Pasco County, where the sheriff recently lost a fight with the County Commission to fund additional deputies, saw crime go down 4 percent.

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