

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

HEARINGS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
NINETY-FIFTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION

ON  
**H.R. 7927 and H.R. 8948**

TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
AND WELFARE TO ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM TO DE-  
VELOP METHODS OF PREVENTION AND TREATMENT RELAT-  
ING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

HEARINGS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,  
ON MARCH 16 AND 17, 1978

use of the Committee on Education and Labor  
CARL D. PERKINS, *Chairman*



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Testimony Delivered  
by the  
Honorable Robert W. Kasten, Jr., (Wisconsin)  
to the  
Subcommittee on Select Education  
of the House Education and Labor Committee  
March 16, 1978

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. As a cosponsor of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Act, I have become increasingly aware of the desperate need for the services and financial support this legislation would provide to those who suffer physical and emotional abuse from their spouses.

Domestic violence is certainly not a new problem, but one which society has chosen to ignore. A study of our culture through legal and religious doctrines reveals the concept that wives and offspring are property and therefore subject to the rules and laws dictated by the husband and/or father -- a concept that we can trace to prehistoric times.

Consequently, our courts and legislatures at all levels of government have been reluctant to intervene in what is perceived as an internal family matter. Indeed, even when legal and financial support is available, the victims' fear and pride, more often than not, prevent them from seeking help.

The tragedy of domestic violence, its emotional and legal complexities, is no more apparent than when trying to understand and deal with the problems of the battered wife. Considered by law enforcement officials to be the single most unreported crime in this

country, "wife beating" is almost impossible to document since it is most often listed by police under "assault and battery" or "disputes". Although estimates vary, experts believe that approximately 5 million women suffer brutal assaults by their husbands or mates each year.

It is only within the last few years that sociologists, the criminal justice system and society itself, have taken a new look at the problems of battered women. Traditionally, brutalized women have suffered in silence, fearing the loss of their economic security, the indifference of the criminal justice system and ridicule by their families and friends.

Largely because of the feminist movement, women have started "fighting back" with the formation of self-help programs that provide supportive services, crisis counseling, and emergency shelter to aid the victims of domestic violence. Programs existing in Wisconsin illustrate what can be done with very limited resources.

In early 1977, a group of concerned women in Madison established the Dane County Advocates for Battered Women, which offers counseling, advocacy, information and referral services to domestic violence victims. Limited funds, facilities and staff permit Women's Advocates to offer these services only from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

In September of 1977, the Women's Resource Center in Racine was formed as part of the local YWCA. In addition to providing shelter and direct services to the victims of domestic violence, the Center also assists sexual assault victims and women faced with the problems of divorce.

Two other groups, the Battered Women's Task Force in Milwaukee, and Women's Horizons in Kenosha, are fulfilling the unmet needs of battered women in their communities. In addition to offering crisis counseling and supportive services to abused women and their children, these groups have worked to educate the general public and sensitize members of the legal/judicial system to the complex and largely misunderstood problems of domestic violence.

As evidence of the support and interest growing for these programs, the Battered Women's Task Force and Women's Horizons have realized one of their primary goals -- the establishment of permanent, emergency shelters for the victims of wife abuse.

Milwaukee's Sojourner Truth House, planned as a temporary haven for about a dozen women and children at a time, will function as a joint enterprise by Family Hospital and the Battered Women's Task Force. Ultimately, the shelter will offer battered women physical and psychological treatment, counseling and referral services, child care facilities and will operate a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week telephone crisis line. The Task Force plans to open Sojourner Truth House this month.

Women's Horizons, incorporated in October of 1976, has already opened a similar facility in Kenosha. In addition to providing primary supportive services to wife abuse victims, Women's Horizons has been working with Kenosha County's social service and law enforcement agencies to more effectively reduce the incidence of violence, not only in the home, but also in the community.

These are only a few of the programs currently existing in Wisconsin -- self-help groups are forming in Waukesha, Green Bay, and Ashland and in many more communities around the state. I am

proud of what my state has accomplished and would like to share with the subcommittee several recommendations for channeling federal assistance to the states in such a manner as to enhance and expand existing programs.

Through meetings and discussions with citizens' groups in Wisconsin, I realized the enormous obstacles facing those who wish to form programs to aid the victims of domestic violence. Although the problems are many and varied, certain fundamental difficulties are apparent.

In planning and establishing a program, the first major obstacle that must be overcome is financing. The very nature of the problem of domestic violence and the services that are needed to deal with these problems require that the program must become an integral part of the community. Consequently, in seeking funds to initiate a program and form a shelter, coordinators usually request assistance from community groups, local governments and federal block-grant programs.

Since government, at the local, state and federal levels, is only beginning to recognize the extent and nature of domestic violence, programs designed to deal with the problem inevitably fall low on the list of a community's priorities for funds. Competing for financial assistance demands a great deal of staff time and effort which would otherwise be used to serve clients.

Consequently, all of the groups in Wisconsin indicate that their most critical need at this point is financial assistance for the establishment of fully-equipped emergency shelters staffed with trained personnel (volunteers and professionals) who would provide direct services, legal and psychological counseling for the victims of domestic violence.

A shelter is necessary for another, very important reason -- protection. Placing a victim in a private home may be the only recourse available, but families are generally unaware that their "act of mercy" may involve legal problems, not to mention an immediate risk to their own safety. A woman who has been badly beaten and abused needs special care and handling which a family cannot provide. A shelter facility not only offers sanctuary but a supportive, sympathetic environment that will help a woman through a crisis.

Once a shelter is established and fully functioning, it becomes part of the community as the staff begins to coordinate their program with other public services. A primary goal of these groups is to promote greater understanding and awareness of domestic violence within the community by working with law enforcement officials, the clergy, social service agencies and the schools. The Kenosha and Milwaukee programs offer limited training programs for law enforcement and social service personnel in their communities, and are currently seeking additional financial assistance that would enable them to expand their public service education efforts.

The Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Act responds to all these concerns and needs. The legislation requires that sixty percent of the funds authorized would be used to finance fully-equipped emergency shelters and the training of both professionals and volunteers who are primarily engaged in areas directly related to domestic violence.

The remaining funds would be set aside for technical assistance, an evaluation of existing laws relating to domestic violence, as well as federal state and local efforts responding to the problems

of domestic violence. In addition, the bill authorizes the establishment of a national clearinghouse which would collect and distribute information on this problem.

Most important, the bill would allow communities to deal with the problems of battered women with minimal control or interference from the federal bureaucracy. The unique and highly sensitive social and emotional complexities involved in domestic violence require that a program respond to the needs of the community it serves.

Representatives from Wisconsin's groups have expressed enthusiastic support for the legislation. However, their concerns about the administration of the program and the implementation of certain sections of the bill should be noted.

All of the groups question the rationale of charging the National Institute of Mental Health, a research oriented agency, with the administration of the program. The critical need for the direct services the bill would provide must take priority. In order to insure that the service emphasis of the legislation remains intact, I suggest that another agency handle the program's administrative functions. I understand Representatives Steers and Boggs have responded to similar concerns by proposing that the program be established under the new Administration for Children, Youth and Family in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. I concur with their recommendation and hope the Members of the Subcommittee will agree.

Another concern that all these groups share is the unending problem of trying to locate funding sources, research material and information about grassroots programs in other cities. In response to this problem, coalitions are beginning to form, whose

memberships consist of researchers, self-help programs and other individuals and groups concerned with the problem of domestic violence. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence is one such organization, with a network of experts in the field whose talents, expertise and experience in working with spouse and child abuse should be utilized.

The fact that the legislation establishes a national clearinghouse to distribute such information is commendable and one of its strongest points. Suggestions for the kinds of materials that it could provide include a list of federal, state and local programs which offer assistance and supportive services to women and children, publications offering guidance and advice to those planning and coordinating a new program and a directory of programs currently functioning across the nation with a description of services they provide.

In developing this legislation, we have an opportunity to structure a program that will coordinate and utilize vast resources already available to aid the victims of domestic violence. Our concern with the growing size of the federal budget requires that we make the most of existing services and facilities while developing a mechanism that responds to the special and immediate needs of women who are abused in their homes.

The funds in this legislation are limited, but if used effectively, the necessity for federal involvement will eventually expire. As more grassroots programs are established and begin to respond to domestic violence, and ultimately to the broader and very real impact of the problem on society, I hope communities will recognize their contributions through increased financial support.

Indeed, Wisconsin advocates for battered women have shown what can be done when concerned, dedicated individuals work together and awaken a community to the realization that domestic violence is common, criminal and a threat to society. We in turn must do everything possible to ensure that their work will continue.

**END**