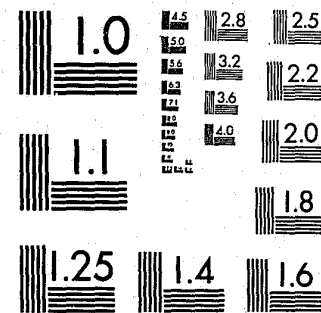


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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 1978

HEARINGS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CHILD AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
NINETY-FIFTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION
ON
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LEGISLATION WITH RESPECT TO
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.
MARCH 4, 1978
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 8, 1978

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STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE SUSANNE B. WILSON
VICE MAYOR OF SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

on behalf of

THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

ON

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION

before

SENATE HUMAN RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CHILD AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

March 8, 1978

PAST PRESIDENTS: Tom Bradley, Mayor, Los Angeles, California; Henry W. Blair, Mayor, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Hans G. Tauscher, Jr., Mayor, Jacksonville, Florida; DIRECTORS: Nathaniel Bates, Council Member, Richmond, California; William Ruggins, Assemblyman, Anchorage, Alaska; William E. Ryan, Council Member, Duluth, Minnesota; Nicholas E. Carano, Council Member, Memphis, Tennessee; Robert E. Carter, Mayor, Fresno, California; L. Alexander, Executive Director, League of International Municipalities; Henry Clayman, Council Member, San Antonio, Texas; Richard L. DeCay, Executive Director, Virginia Municipal League; Philip A. Decker, Executive Director, American League of Cities; Arthur M. Owen, Mayor, Niagara, New York; Margaret T. Nemes, Mayor, Phoenix, Arizona; William E. Hahn, Jr., Mayor, Rochester, New York; Fred Harrison, Mayor, Portland, Oregon; Carl T. Langford, Mayor, Chicago, Illinois; Emma Handwerker, Council President, Denver, Colorado; Charles J. Horn, Mayor, Kalamazoo, Michigan; William H. Hurdell, III, Mayor, Indianapolis, Indiana; Raymond Jackson, Chief, Miami, Florida; Lorraine Municipal Association; Cathy Reynolds, Council Member, Denver, Colorado; Ramsey Shaw, Executive Director, Massachusetts League of Cities and Towns; Charles J. Presbiter, Executive Director, Executive Director, Association of Washington Cities; Bartlett Tucker, Chairperson, District of Columbia Council; Thompson, D.C.; David J. Hunt, Mayor, Birmingham, Alabama; Joel Wachs, Council Member, Los Angeles, California; William L. Whitener, Mayor, Pease, Maine.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, I am Susanne B. Wilson, Vice Mayor of the City of San Jose and Chairperson of the National League of Cities' Public Safety Policy Committee. Thank you for inviting me, on behalf of the National League of Cities, to testify before you this morning on an issue which is vitally important both to NLC and the nation. As an organization that represents some 15,000 cities throughout this country, we are encouraged by the fact that legislative hearings are being held on family violence. I want to congratulate Senator Cranston for his willingness to move ahead in order to pursue federal action to aid victims of family violence.

In February of 1976, the National League of Cities, through its Criminal Justice Program, held the First National Conference on Women and Crime. I was privileged to be part of that conference which truly was an historic first in addressing, at the national level, such issues as the employment of women in criminal justice, the treatment of the woman and girl offender in the criminal justice system, and female victims of crime. There were 300 people attending that conference, most of whom heard for the first time about the nature and extent of what we called then -- wife beating in America.

Most of us attending the conference were vaguely aware that some sort of problem existed, and all of us probably knew some women who had been beaten by their husbands or male companions. What we didn't know, and what the session on wife beating at the conference really did for us, was to help us discover that the problem was widespread and there were actions that could be taken

to aid these victims. We heard from a victim who, with difficulty and pain in her voice, brought the immediacy and tragedy of violence in the home to local officials at that conference.

The National League of Cities has been since that time very active in bringing attention to the family violence issue. Our Criminal Justice Program co-sponsored a conference with the Women's Legal Defense Fund on services for battered women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. We have held standing room only workshops on family violence at our annual convention, the Congress of Cities, for two consecutive years. We continue to assist elected officials, community groups, and women's organizations by answering questions and sending information to them regarding what they can do in their own communities to establish programs for family violence victims. The Women and Crime Conference Proceedings were published and are still in great demand, mostly because of the quality of and interest generated by the workshop on wife beating.

At the Congress of Cities in 1976, a policy was adopted calling for the establishment of a federal program to fund shelters and for better police training and criminal justice system handling of the family violence problem. We were the first national organization of elected officials to firmly call for resolving many of the problems surrounding violence in the family. In 1977, we strengthened and expanded that initial policy. The Board of Directors of the National League of Cities has also placed a priority on passage of federal legislation dealing with family violence in 1978. It should

be clear to members of the Subcommittee that our knowledge, interest, and our expertise in this area are extensive and continuing.

The 1978 National Municipal Policy reads:

"The family violence problem could grow to crisis proportions unless the federal government acts immediately to aid victims of family violence by:

1. Funding shelter counseling facilities for battered women and children.
2. Allowing battered women who have left their homes to receive emergency welfare payments [on a priority basis].
3. Requiring the Legal Services Corporation to provide emergency services to battered women wishing to seek economic and legal redress against their husbands/mates.
4. Coordinating the various federal programs that affect abused children and battered women.
5. Establishing a national family violence research program.
6. Providing expanded training to police and prosecutors in the handling of family violence situations."

These six actions called for in our policy all are in areas that should be addressed in the legislation. I will now speak to these six issues more fully and provide suggestions for ways the federal government can best achieve these goals.

The necessity for providing funds for shelters and counseling is obvious. We cannot even begin to address the causes of or the solutions to family violence until we first provide a mechanism to take victims immediately out of life-threatening situations. Shelters should not be seen as the answer to the problems of battered women and children, but as a first step in a comprehensive program to solve all facets of this problem. It is our belief, however, that until we can get shelters in those communities that need them, we will not be able to take effective action.

Women who leave their homes, by and large, leave their financial support behind them. In order for them to survive, to make decisions, and to find on their own a means to resolve their individual situation, our social service systems and other institutions must become more immediately responsive to their needs. One way to do this is for our aid to families -- primarily welfare programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children -- to provide emergency welfare assistance to these women. Family violence victims should be given priority and should not have to wait weeks and weeks just for an appointment to see a welfare worker to determine eligibility. This has been done in at least one state, Minnesota; and for that reason, we believe this type of assistance deserves exploration by the federal government to see how it can be implemented in other states.

The Legal Services Corporation exists to provide civil remedies to problems of poor people through the courts. Unfortunately, it is our understanding that the Legal Services Corporation does not

place a priority on family law. Consequently, women seeking civil legal action against abusive spouses such as a legal separation or a divorce, often do not receive help from the Legal Services Corporation. This occurs for a variety of reasons, but nevertheless, action should be taken to assure that family violence victims receive adequate and quality help from the legal services agencies.

Many federal agencies can and are providing funds for a variety of programs which serve family violence victims. Although we are aware there is no one program that is designed to assist these people, we do know that some shelters have received local Community Development funds and staff through the Comprehensive Employment Training Act. In addition, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration provides funds for police training and victim witness assistance in this area. ACTION's VISTA Volunteers also have been instrumental in many cities helping to start programs. On occasion, Title XX funds have been used for shelters and counseling. Some localities have also designated portions of their General Revenue Sharing allocation to programs and shelters for battered women.

What this shows is that we at the local level have been willing and able to allocate some of our federal funds for these programs. However, we need a coordinating mechanism at the federal level to make it easier for state and local government to combine these funds from different sources into a total program. For example, it is our understanding that the new Community Development regulations will specifically state that funds can be spent on shelters. Often, federal regulations are interpreted differently by various federal

regional offices, and in some cases, differently by cities. Furthermore, there have been no clear and uniform guidelines or mechanisms established telling us how to use these funds to aid battered women most effectively.

More research into the family violence problem is certainly necessary and is part of our national policy. A research program, however, should be closely tied to aiding and improving new and ongoing programs, and should not reduce greatly funds for operating programs.

Finally, as we debated the National Municipal Policy in 1977, it became quite clear to us who have a special interest in crime, criminal justice, and public safety that the criminal justice system just is not doing its job in this area. Our local police department, district attorney offices, and courts need widely expanded assistance if they are to deal effectively with family violence victims and offenders. There are plenty of program models that have been developed, both locally and by LEAA, that could be implemented in many cities throughout the country. It is only through federal support and federal encouragement that these programs and procedures can become widespread.

These are the principles that we believe should be incorporated into a federal family violence program. We urge the Congress to act quickly, and pledge the full support of NLC towards initiating and stimulating responsive policies and services for victims of violence in the home.

END