

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PREVENTION AND SERVICES

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-SIXTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

HEARINGS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C., ON JULY 10, 11, 1979

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(II)

CONTENTS

	Page
Hearings held in Washington, D.C. on:	
July 10, 1979	1
July 11, 1979	147
Statement of—	
Allen, Clara L., Director, New Jersey Division on Women, Department of Community Affairs, Trenton, N.J.	67
Allison, William W., deputy director, Community Services Administration	213
Barnes, Hon. Michael D., a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland; accompanied by Cynthia Anderson and Lise Moulton	13
Boggs, Hon. Lindy, a Representative in Congress from the State of Louisiana	12
Brown, Sam, Director, ACTION; accompanied by Torrie Mattes, Office of Policy and Planning; Kathleen Fojtik, National Technical Assistance Center; and Sharon Vaughan, Women's Shelter, St. Paul, Minn.	181
Campbell, Jane, National Council of Churches	150
Dames, Cynthia, battered womens project, Santa Fe, N. Mex.	140
Edelstein, Dr. Saul, director, emergency services, George Washington University Hospital	39
Ferraro, Hon. Geraldine, a Representative in Congress from the State of New York	5
Fleming, Richard C.D., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Neighborhoods, Voluntary Associations and Community Protection, Department of Housing and Urban Development; William Allison, Deputy Director, Community Services Administration	209
Goodrich, Hon. George Herbert, associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, head of the Family Division	50
Green, Kinsey, executive director, American Home Economic Association	159
Grimes, J. Robert, Assistant Administrator, Office of Criminal Justice Programs, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration; accompanied by Jeannie Neidermeyer-Santos, program manager, family violence program	188
Halsey, Capt. Patricia, U.S. Marine Corps; and Lt. (jg.) Serge R. Doucette, Jr., Bureau of Medicine and Surgery for the Navy, head of family advocacy program	58
Hyde, Hon. Henry J., a Representative in Congress from the State of Illinois	16
Marschner, P.J., director of program development, Center for Women Policy Studies, accompanied by Diane Hamlin, director, Resource Center	228
McMahon, Ginger, martial abuse project, Delaware County, Pa.	136
Meyer, Jeanie Keeny, police department, Kansas City, Mo.	33
Mikulski, Hon. Barbara A., a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland	23
Moore, Janice, My Sister's Place, Washington, D.C.	133
Nazeer, Freda, director, legislation and research, General Federation of Women's Clubs on behalf of Mrs. Quint	198
Olson, Beth, Junior League, Jacksonville, Fla.	154
Pence, Ellen, State Director of battered women's programs, Department of Corrections, St. Paul, Minn.	107
Ramirez, Blandina Cardenas, Commissioner, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; accompanied by June Zeitlin, Office of Domestic Violence	166
Stahly, Geraldine, WomenShelter, Long Beach, Calif.	128
Warren, Faye, General Federation of Women's Clubs, deputy director for the Hands Up program	200

(III)

IV

Prepared statements, letters, supplemental materials, et cetera.—	
Allen, Clara L., director, New Jersey Division on Women, Department of Community Affairs, Trenton, N.J.:	
"Accused Wife Slayer Defied Court," newspaper article from Star Ledger, October 3, 1978.....	93
"Atlantic County Abuse Center, Counseling, Referral, and Shelter Program for Victims of Domestic Violence," article entitled.....	87
"Battered Women's Guide," a leaflet.....	84
Prepared statement of..... 66388	71
"Section 10—Coordination of Federal Programs".....	90
"Section 11—Definitions".....	92
"Senate Committee Substitute for Senate No. 807".....	95
"Senate No. 3244".....	98
"Shelter for Battered Filled to Capacity," newspaper article from Star Ledger, March 11, 1979.....	94
Allison, William, Deputy Director, Community Services Administration:	
Factsheet.....	216
Information requested entitled "Community Services Administration Support of Domestic Violence Projects".....	220
Prepared statement of.....	214
Barnes, Hon. Michael D., a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland, prepared statement of.....	13
Boggs, Hon. Lindy, a Representative in Congress from the State of Louisiana, prepared statement of.....	2
Brown, Samuel W., Director, ACTION Agency, prepared statement of.....	183
Campbell, Jane, National Council of Churches:	
Letter to Chairman Simon, dated July 11, 1979.....	149
Prepared statement on behalf of.....	147
Dames, Cynthia, battered women's project, Santa Fe, N. Mex., prepared statement of.....	117
Doucette, Lt. (jg.) Serge R., Jr., Medical Service Corps, U.S. Navy Reserve, head, family advocacy program, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Department of the Navy:	
"Family Advocacy: Program Elements and Format," article entitled.....	57
Prepared statement of.....	55
Fleming, Richard, C. D., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Neighborhoods, Voluntary Associations and Community Protection, Department of Housing and Urban Development:	
Letter to Chairman Simon, enclosing information requested.....	219
Prepared statement of.....	212
Goodrich, Hon. George Herbert, associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, head of the Family Division, prepared statement of.....	49
Green, Kinsey, executive director, American Home Economics Association, prepared statement of.....	156
Grimes, J. Robert, Assistant Administrator, Office of Criminal Justice Programs, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, prepared statement of.....	192
Hyde, Hon. Henry J., a Representative in Congress from the State of Illinois, prepared statement of.....	16
Marschner, P. J., director of program development, Center for Women Policy Studies, prepared statement of.....	235
McMahon, Ginger, administrative Director of a domestic violence project, Delaware County, prepared statement of.....	125
Meyer, Jeanie Keeny, police department, Kansas City, Mo. prepared statement of.....	31
Mikulski, Hon. Barbara A., a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland, prepared statement of.....	23
Miller, Hon. George, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, prepared statement of.....	30
Moore, Janice, My Sister's Place, Women's Legal Defense Fund, Washington, D.C., prepared statement of.....	123
Olson, Beth, Junior League, Jacksonville, Fla., prepared statement of.....	151

V

Prepared statements, letters, supplemental materials, etc.—con.	
Pence, Ellen, State Director of battered women's programs, Department of Corrections, St. Paul, Minn., prepared statement of.....	101
Quint, A. M., president, General Federation of Women's Clubs, prepared statement enclosing a resolution.....	202
Ramirez, Blandina Cardenas, Commissioner, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Office of Human Development Services, prepared statement of.....	171
Stahly, Geraldine Butts, executive director, WomenShelter, Long Beach, Calif., letter to Select Education Subcommittee, dated July 10, 1979, enclosing a statement.....	119
Warren, Faye, General Federation of Women's Clubs, deputy director, Hands Up program:	
Prepared statement of.....	204
Projects of:	
Battered Spouses—Big Rapids Intermediate Women's Club, Mich.....	208
Battered Spouses—Junior Women's Club of Golden Beach, Md.....	206
Child Abuse and Neglect (CA/N) North Carolina.....	205
Family abuse and neglect prevention and education program—Haven Hills, Inc.—Canoga Park Women's Club, Canoga	206
Junior Women's Club, Calif.....	207
West Virginia's campaign against child abuse and neglect...	207
APPENDIX	
"Battered Wives," article from Baltimore Jewish Times.....	530
Carstenson, Dr. Blue, legislative director, Minnesota Social Service Association, St. Paul, Minn., letter to Congressman Erdahl, dated July 9, enclosing testimony.....	244
Catania, Susan, chairwoman, Illinois Commission on the Status of Women, letter to Chairman Simon, dated June 1, 1979.....	409
Center for Women Policy Studies:	
"A Message To Parents About: Child Sexual Abuse," a publication entitled.....	436
"Family Violence Program," fiscal year 1978, local projects.....	461
Literature, a listing of publications.....	491
Response to violence and sexual abuse in the family, a publication entitled:	
Vol. 2, No. 2, November/December, 1978.....	410
Vol. 2, No. 5, March 1979.....	418
Vol. 2, No. 6, April 1979.....	426
"Violence In the Home Is A Crime Against The Whole Family," a publication entitled.....	453
"What If Your Child Has Been Sexually Molested," a booklet entitled.....	458
Cochran, Johnnie L., Jr., assistant district attorney, Los Angeles, Calif.: Congressional testimony.....	407
Letter to Chairman Simon, dated July 6, 1979, enclosing recommendations.....	402
Cotter, Hon. William R., a Representative in Congress from the State of Connecticut:	
"Help for Battered Women in Connecticut," a list.....	261
Testimony of.....	258
DASH, Inc., a group of citizens in a 13 county area of eastern Kentucky, testimony of.....	280
Family Service Association of America and The National Conference of Catholic Charities, position statement..... 66380	262
General Federation of Women's Clubs, Washington, D.C.:	
"Domestic and Personal Violence," article entitled..... 66395	509
Hands Up booklet.....	500
Hands Up objective, 1979.....	508
Kuhle, Shirley J., president, Nebraska Task Force on Domestic Violence:	
"Rural Perspective on Domestic Violence," statement on..... 66377	321
Statement presented to Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, July 9, 1979.....	328
Moakley, Hon. John Joseph, a Representative in Congress from the State of Massachusetts, testimony of.....	314

	Page
National Council of Jewish Women, New York, New York, testimony of.	272
National Technical Assistance Center on Family Violence, Ann Arbor, Mich., summary report of domestic violence assistance organizations.	330
Nordenbrook, Ruth, chairperson, Committee of Women and Criminal Justice, Section of Criminal Justice, American Bar Association, statement on behalf of.	245
Parolla, Helen R., director, Public Policy Center, National Board, YWCA, testimony of.	270
Pence, Ellen, State Director, Minnesota programs for battered women: "Minnesota Data Collection on Battered Women: System Design and Data Analysis," excerpt of a report.	287
Testimony of.	284
Pines, Burt, city Attorney, city of Los Angeles, Calif., domestic violence program.	367
Schindler, Jayne, legislative chairman, Colorado Eagle Forum, Wheatridge, Colorado, Statement in Opposition to H.R. 2977, dated Oct. 4, 1979, enclosing several newspaper articles.	537
Simons, Larry L., national vice president, International Brotherhood of Police Officers, statement of.	256
Stern, Barbara, Rockland Family Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence, Nyack, N.Y., written testimony of.	241
Stonehill, Harriet, director of Public Affairs, B'nai B'rith Women, Washington, D.C., statement of.	277
Womens Justice Center, Detroit, Mich., statement of.	499

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Statement Submitted to the
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

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POSITION STATEMENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL, HR. 2977

Submitted by:
The Family Service Association of America
and
The National Conference of Catholic Charities

July 27, 1979

On July 11, 1979 oral testimony was given before the Subcommittee on Select Education for the Coalition of Family Organizations by the American Home Economics Association. The Family Service Association of America as a member of the Coalition supported the statement given at that time. This written statement is intended to further specify our position and is jointly submitted with the National Conference of Catholic Charities.

The National Conference of Catholic Charities and the Family Service Association of America want to express their thanks to the House Subcommittee on Select Education of the House Education and Labor Committee for once again holding hearings on the very important issue of domestic violence. Because this social problem has long been buried by custom and the unwillingness of society to admit its existence, it is especially important that the Congress bring enlightened leadership to this matter. Testimony given before this Subcommittee last year called attention to alarming statistics and helped establish the credibility of this issue as being of major importance and epidemic in nature. We hope the Committee will expand its area of inquiry this year to include an analysis of how federal assistance would best be utilized.

For most of this century the Family Service Association has been the major service organization in this country having as its single focus and priority, American families. The National Conference of Catholic Charities in its sixty-nine year history of reflecting the social concerns of the church has always had a major commitment to strengthening families. Our structures are composed of hundreds of member agencies, thousands of practitioners and many, many thousands of volunteers. Our agencies provide a

variety of services to families spanning the areas of counseling, advocacy and family life education. It is in all of these areas of professional and lay activities that our agencies have encountered the growing problem of domestic violence. The Family Service Association's membership has indicated, for example, through a study called the "Family Listening Post" a growing number of incidences of domestic violence in their communities. The experience of the membership of the National Conference of Catholic Charities reaffirms the seriousness of this problem. As national organizations, therefore, we share a strong commitment and priority concern to address this problem at the level of federal policy. We have, therefore, followed the legislative and bureaucratic developments of the 95th and 96th Congress with interest and concern.

While our national organizations do not believe that the American family as an entity is becoming obsolete or is about to disappear, we do acknowledge that some very serious problems are confronting families and that violence is one of the most critical.

When we look at the problem of violence in families and the fact that shelters are realistically a ~~temporary~~ but essential respite for a woman and her children, we are confronted by the realities of where the federal categorical system, whatever its good points, has taken us. If we want to assist a family in the majority of cases where a woman has chosen to return to the family, then there is no program and no funding to help the family. Title XX, if one looks at the Planning Notes published by HEW, shows little emphasis on families. Indeed, the very goal structure of Title XX fails to focus on families as the integrating structures which our human services system should strengthen. The experiences of our member agencies do not indicate that Title XX has overcome this problem.

A service provider--especially one concerned with families--must relate to each individual program through various regulations, structures and state offices. When enacted, Title XX was intended to fund, at the state level, new approaches to human services in a non-categorical manner. In reality, it has tended to subsidize well established, federal categorical programs in the old patterns. Competition for such funding is very keen and the winners are the non-family-focused categorical programs. It would be quite difficult, for example, for providers of emergency shelter programs to gain access to Title XX dollars in most states.

And where are families? And how do we address issues such as domestic violence? If there were the kind of generic office in HEW that related directly to assisting communities to help families, then the issue of domestic violence would have been naturally encompassed in that structure. But instead, we find a hastily created Office on Domestic Violence (instead of an Office on Families) which ignores the real problem: the lack of an explicit family focus inside HEW and inside government generally. (It might be said that the urgency and dominance of domestic violence on the national scene is symptomatic of the general neglect and lack of focus on families--and reflective of the fact that there is now no federal resource to which service providers can turn for assistance in helping families involved in the cycle of violence.)

Under this Administration, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families was established. This Administration has failed to encourage leadership or research centrally focused on families within ACYF. We believe that it should be clearly understood that we do not see this Office on Domestic Violence as the answer--or even a realistic beginning--to the need for federal policy makers to become concerned about what is happening to American families. We support HR 2977 and do not object to the creation of a new office to deal with this problem, as long as it is

properly staffed by qualified professionals with training and experience in the field of human services. We do so because there is a clear and present need for a program to provide crisis intervention on behalf of abused women and their children. But we believe such a program should be housed in a generic Office on Families within ACTF. What is needed is an appropriate federal response to the larger needs of families in this society. We support this legislation, and this new office as described in the legislation, in that context.

Under this legislation the emphasis should be not only an emergency shelter but also on what kinds of preventive help we can provide for the majority of abused women--those who still reside with their families or who return to them from their emergency shelters. And we believe that shelters funded under this legislation should be required to offer the option of family counseling to victims living in the shelter and that family counseling and therapy continue to be made available after the woman has returned to her family. In other words, if this program is to have any real impact on the cycle of violence in families, then it must address the need for services to these families. To rehabilitate a family, the commitment to services should be available to victims of domestic violence whether they are in a shelter or not. But we are then confronted with the problem again inherent in this legislation: the Office on Domestic Violence as now described in this legislation only addresses the issue of the shelter and limited services provided through the shelter. Unless it is structured and staffed to really address the totality of the problem of violence in families, we are back to the old problem that has plagued us for so long: How do we help families in this country when there are so few resources to assist us? How do we administer a program to reach them? And when will the Congress provide the leadership to make this happen?

The White House Conference on Families which is scheduled for the Spring of 1981 comes at a time when there is much speculation about American families and their relative weaknesses and strengths. It is the responsibility of national organizations to engage in the process of looking at the way in which the federal government responds to the needs and problems of families and to call this to the attention of the Congress. It is our hope that we can help this Subcommittee in the weeks ahead, before markup, to develop a bill that will be supportive of families in its effort to assist victims of domestic violence.

On the following pages we will suggest some changes in the legislation that should be addressed either in the bill itself or in the language of the Report that accompanies this legislation.

RECOMMENDATION FOR REPORT LANGUAGE FOR HR 2977

from

The National Conference of Catholic Charities
and
The Family Service Association of America

July, 1979

1. "The Committee, while not specifying this in the legislation because it wishes to leave some discretion to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would strongly urge that the Department establish a Bureau of Families which would be comparable in status to that which has been created for children. The Committee believes such action to be consistent with the mission of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families established by this Administration in 1976.

"Within such a Bureau for Families should be the office with administrative responsibility for a program on Domestic Violence. Such an office should be logically located within a Family Bureau because violence in families not only affects the spouse involved but also the entire family structure including children and elderly parents.

"The Committee suggests that the Office on Domestic Violence within the Family Bureau structure engage in collection of data and basic research to determine the extent of violence in families. It should do this in conjunction with program administration which determines the kind of treatment having the most success in rehabilitating individuals and families."

2. "While the Committee is leaving some discretion in the legislation to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Committee intends that projects which would be supported by this grant in aid program would be required to offer a variety of services including family counseling. The Committee believes, however, that family counseling should be accessible to only those victims for whom it is feasible and acceptable.

"Further, the Committee directs the Department that prevention as provided by this legislation should not only reach the victim seeking emergency shelter and services away from the home (intervention) but also should include the victim who returns to his or her family (prevention). The majority of victims leaving a shelter return to their families. Assistance to a family in which there is violence, and rehabilitation for its members can occur if services are available beyond the time the victim is residing in the shelter. For those victims choosing not to return to the family environment, follow-up services are also needed."

END