

**Report of the
New Jersey Advisory Council on
Domestic Violence**

July 2001

NJ Advisory Council On Domestic Violence

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The New Jersey Advisory Council on Domestic Violence (NJACDV) was created by legislation in 1987. The Council is charged with the following responsibilities with respect to improving the laws, public policy and services for victims of domestic violence:

- ◆ To monitor the effectiveness of laws concerning domestic violence and make recommendations for their improvement.
- ◆ To review proposed legislation and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature
- ◆ To study the needs, priorities, programs and policies throughout the State
- ◆ To ensure that providers and the community are aware of the needs and services
- ◆ To make recommendations for community education and training programs

The NJACDV is mandated to periodically advise the Directors of the Division of Youth and Family Services and the Division on Women regarding its activities, findings and recommendations. This Report reflects the activities and decisions made by the Advisory Council during the year 2000.

I. ACTIVITIES

During 2000, the Council focused its efforts on the following activities:

➤ **Legislation -**

Through written correspondence to New Jersey legislators and the Governor, the Council recommended passage of legislation to:

- 1) Make victims eligible for unemployment compensation if they leave their job due to domestic violence (Senate Bill 869);
- 2) Allow a tax credit against gross income tax for 50% of contributions of \$100 or more to domestic violence shelters (Senate Bill 287); and
- 3) Create a New Jersey Task Force on Workplace Violence, which would include a representative from the "battered women's community" (Assembly Bill 1527).

Additionally, the Council urged New Jersey Congresspersons to pass the federal Violence Against Women Act. The Council was pleased that both Senate Bill 287 and the federal Violence Against Women Act both became law during 2000.

➤ **Art Exhibit, October 19, 2000**

The Advisory Council organized and sponsored a one-day exhibit of survivor art displayed at the State House in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The exhibit was a tribute to the courage of survivors and their children. Legislators were invited to view the exhibit and meet with Council members to discuss matters of concern to victims and their families.

➤ **Educational Brochure**

A brochure was created this year as part of the Council's outreach efforts to advise the public of the membership and role of the Advisory Council.

➤ **Pro Prosecution Task Force Report - *Model Criminal Justice System Response to Domestic Violence***

At a press conference on December 18, 2000, the Advisory Council released and presented the report of its Pro-Prosecution Task Force to the New Jersey Prosecutors' Association and the New Jersey Police Chiefs' Association. The 46-page report is entitled *Model Criminal Justice System Response to Domestic Violence*. [This report is the product of research and writing initiated by the Task Force in 1996.] The Report contains over 74 recommendations for pro-active, coordinated measures that the criminal justice system and local communities can implement to enhance the safety of victims and their children and increase batterer accountability.

II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ **Additional funding for victim services is urgently needed.**

Additional funding is urgently needed for many vital and lifesaving services available through the domestic violence service provider network. The Uniform Crime Reports show that domestic violence remains a major issue for New Jersey and the nation. More funds are needed to increase shelter space for victims and their children and for providing transitional housing. Funds for crisis response team initiatives of local police departments are also needed. Moreover, affordable rental housing units continue to be in scarce supply in New Jersey, thereby limiting safety options for battered women. Finally, providing affordable quality childcare and accessible and affordable transportation services is of crucial importance in enabling battered women to seek alternatives to living with domestic violence.

Domestic violence service agencies are experiencing greater demand for their outreach and advocacy services, representing a change from demand for shelter services. Many agencies currently maintain waiting lists for outreach and advocacy services because they lack the funds to hire staff to meet the needs of the community. Thus, many women are left in dangerous situations without adequate support and advice to help them make a transition.

➤ **Funding is urgently needed for improving and increasing services to children.**

The harm done to children who grow up in homes where there is domestic violence continues to be of great concern to the Council. Since its Report, *Children and Domestic Violence*, issued in 1998 (also available through the Division on Women), the Council has continued to monitor the progress made by various state and private agencies, as well as court committees and working groups, in addressing the needs of children and victims. Increasing funding for effective interventions for children exposed to domestic violence should be a matter of high priority to those who set policy, create legislative remedies, and determine spending priorities. Effective interventions are an essential part of a prevention strategy. One such program is "Peace: A Learned Solution" (PALS).

The PALS program was initiated in 1998 by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) through Providence House, its lead domestic violence agency in Burlington County. The program provides intensive therapeutic treatment and support services to children aged three to ten who have witnessed or been the victims of domestic violence. Children in the program receive child care, art, play, dramas, and dance/movement therapy, educational support and transportation for free for six months, followed by an additional six months of follow-up services. To date approximately 82 children have completed the PALS program.

The PALS program is proving to be an effective intervention, according to results of the research component of the PALS program, which operates under the direction of Dr. Linda Jeffrey of Rowan University, who is also the chair of the Evaluation Committee of the Supreme Court State Working Group on Domestic Violence. The research shows that over "two-thirds of the children who enter PALS suffer clinical and borderline levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, aggression, thought problems, and delinquent behavior," said Charles Venti, Director, DYFS, in a May 2000 press release issued by the Department of Human Services. "Following their participation in the PALS program," Venti went on to say, "most of the children return to the normal range in overall behavioral and emotional levels, indicating a highly effective intervention approach for the littlest victims of domestic violence." This Council recommends that the Legislature approve expanded funding for the PALS program so that the PALS concept can be replicated statewide. As is often noted, we can make no greater investment in our future than by investing in our children.

➤ **Increased funding and coordination are needed to improve the effectiveness of the prosecution of domestic violence crimes.**

New Jersey should take immediate steps to improve the effectiveness of prosecution of domestic violence cases. Some of the recommendations contained in the Pro-Prosecution Task Force Report may be implemented swiftly with existing resources. Others recommendations will require that new resources be identified. The Governor, Legislature, the judiciary, law enforcement and the numerous leaders of both the state and local government entities have an important role to play in improving and increasing effective prosecution of domestic violence cases, and in improving and increasing criminal justice services to victims, including victim-witness programs.

The Council calls on policy makers at all levels to work with victim advocates to identify existing and potential state, federal and private resources that will make the recommendations of the Task Force a reality throughout New Jersey. The NJACDV strongly encourages all state and local leaders to review the report and launch efforts to implement and, where necessary, fund the suggested practices through their budget processes. These will not be frivolous expenditures, but rather significant investments in increasing the safety and desirability of our communities. Copies of the Report are available through the Division on Women, and may be obtained by calling 1-609-292-8840.

➤ **Pending legislation needs to be passed to strengthen protections for victims and to increase batterer accountability.**

The Council will continue to support passage of Senate Bill 287, which will encourage donations to domestic violence shelters, and passage of Assembly Bill 1527, which will create a task force to study the problem of Workplace Violence including domestic violence. The Council is also considering supporting passage of Senate Bill 283, which would prohibit persons convicted of child abuse, domestic violence or stalking from purchasing or owning a firearm.

The Council applauds the actions of the Governor, Legislature and other departments of government for the actions they have taken to adopt policies, laws, protocols and programs to keep families safe and stable and to hold batterers accountable. Council members are happy to speak with law makers and policy makers on matters concerning victims of domestic violence, or refer interested parties to others who can be of help. Working together we can increase family and community safety and batterer accountability.