

Good morning Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the reappointment of Judges.

On a Sunday night in October of 2007, my husband's abuse took a dangerous turn and the violence with which we had lived, was directed at my oldest child. While my 10 year old screamed for him to stop, my oldest daughter, 18, and all 100 lbs of her tried to protect me. My husband, more than twice her size, hit her and kicked her and sent her flying across the room. I had taken his abuse for years but now he had struck my child. The abuse stopped here.

Although we did not realize it then, we were another family caught up in the cycle of Domestic Violence and worse, in the throws of a court system that just doesn't have a clear understanding of Domestic Violence. An issue that is more prevalent today than we care to believe. And all the more reason why we need to speak up, educate the public and enlist the help of all of our resources.

In my case, my husband assaulted his sister, his step-daughter and myself. He was arrested 5 times between that original incident in October 2007 and April 2008 and police reports were filed in 2 other incidents involving myself and my children. He took anger management, was refused family violence class due to the continued arrests and sent to the Evolve Program. Each time he was issued a Protective Order which required him to be 100 yards away and have no contact. Each time he was arrested, he was violating one of the protective order. In 4 of those arrests and in multiple hearings thereafter, he appeared before the same Judge, Judge Karen Nash Sequino, in Derby. Each time she reminded him not to do it again, to abide by the protective order and show up for court. My oldest daughter was on the protective orders because he assaulted her. Physical neglect was substantiated regarding my son in the original incident. Judge Sequino would not put my 10 year old on the order. When I asked why, I was told that it was because she was his biological daughter and *he hadn't hit her yet*. Instead, I had to look to yet another court, civil court for a restraining order to protect my child.

All victims are invited to come forward and speak. I did. I begged her to protect us. I told her how he punched me, how he chased us, how he called all day and all night. I explained how he sat on the street a little over 100 yards away and watched our house and watched my job. I told her how he kept getting closer and closer. I told her how he said he would leave me dead on my front lawn for my children to find. She explained that he had rights. That he always came to court. That he attended classes. And that there was no "actual contact performed, no repeat violence and no entering the dwelling" to warrant a higher bond. In one hearing she said that the warrant was for an incident that happened before the one he was currently incarcerated for and "there was no purpose in punishing him for something that happened before". *Four arrests within 1 month for violating the protective orders*. I explained that even while he was showing up for court and taking his classes, he was still violating the orders. I didn't want him to follow through with his threat. I didn't want to die. I had police officers, lieutenants, victims advocates and prosecutors all asking her to keep him away. They set a cash bond and she'd turn it into a surety bond and he'd be back out and come straight back at us. Judge Sequino told me to use my resources...wasn't she my resource?? I called the police. I had both protective orders and restraining orders. I filed for divorce and Attorney Sadaka was able to get myself and my child some protection there. But the criminal justice system was not protecting us.

At one point, he was sentenced and served 90 days. And I was given a Standing Criminal Restraining Order. For all of this...just 90 days. And while all this went on, he went after his new girlfriend. The statements were almost the same. 4 women. And as long as he showed for his next court date, she would let him back out. And then there was fifth woman.

Ultimately, on a Saturday night in May 2009, my 11 year old daughter and I were returning home. As we got out of the car I heard her scream "Mom, Mom, Mom... it's dad!!!" I turned and there he was...parked behind my car. And we were cornered exactly where he said we'd be...on my front lawn. He looked right at us...mocking us. She screamed and I grabbed her and got into the car and somehow we got to the police station. He ran and hid for 3 weeks and eventually turned himself in. His cases were combined and he was sentenced on the cap with one of the women at the end of May and sentenced to 6 months in June for violating the conditions of release by coming to my house.

Throughout all of this, the judge did not have a clear understanding of what that protective order was for. The judge seemed to get tripped up on the "no contact" part. It also says no threatening, no harassing and no stalking. He was continuing to intimidate us. He was being a bully. He was violating the orders. I was not going to allow him to hit me again or hurt my child to satisfy the court's misinterpretation of the order.

I am speaking out today, not because this judge is a bad judge. I just don't think she, and others like her, fully understand the cycle of abuse or the mindset of the abuser. Judges need to be educated on the patterns of abuse. They need to act as our resource and know that they have the power and the duty to protect those who just can't protect themselves.

We need to have courts that specialize in Domestic Violence crimes and judges that are educated on the issue. They need to understand that just because the protective order says "no contact" it does not necessitate *physical contact*. Protective and restraining orders need to be fully enforced.

Judges need to follow through on punishments and hold the abusers accountable for any violation. After all, it is not only a violation of the protective or restraining order; it is a violation of a court order. *A judge's court order.*

We need to be pro-active not re-active. Don't wait until the next person is killed. Educate the judges...change the courts...send a clear message that Domestic Violence will not be tolerated...on any level.

We need to break the cycle of abuse. Domestic Violence is at epidemic levels. And we need all of the resources available to us to stop it from spreading.

You are our resource and we need your help.

Thank you.



Statement made by :

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