

HB 5497

Dear Honorable Legislators,

I am writing to you about a matter of domestic violence that my children and I have had to endure and my struggle with our court system. I need to start off by telling you that I have been scared to write to you because of repercussions. I also need to tell you that I have been compelled to write to you because of the domestic violence I have read in the newspapers and seen on the television and the poor response and protection our judicial system gives to these matters. As the consumer, as a mother, as an interested taxpayer, I don't care about the lack of funds or the lack of resources the judicial system has to address these issues. My children and my friends aren't going to care either when I and or my children end up forever injured or dead because of a lack of response.

I am a college educated woman who for the past several years made a six digit income. I have multiple degrees and certifications. With less self esteem almost ten years ago I went through a divorce with an abusive husband. The courts at that time, it seemed to me, were not kind to women who had been abused and actually, in my case, favored the perpetrator as he would not bring the children up to be victims. This is what I was told by my lawyer at the time. I dropped the case and went back to my abusive husband for the sake of not leaving my children with him. I divorced him two years later without charges of abuse, which meant a better outcome for my children and I. We got therapy and alone we were better than when we were with their father. My children have grown up very well on many different levels because of my guidance and my love towards them.

My second husband was a school teacher and involved with a civics organization that meets the needs of children when I met him in 2005. No one gave any indication to me that he had emotional problems. He got along very well with my children, and with me in my forties and he in his fifties, we decided to get married that summer. Our baby daughter was born early the next summer and my husband began to unravel by that fall. I tried throughout the fall to get him mental health help, he continued to deteriorate and he was admitted to the psychiatric unit at Yale Hospital in the winter of 2006. He continued to work as a teacher and was involved with an organizational child event on the day he went to the Institute and admitted to having both suicidal and, towards my children and me, homicidal ideations. He was smiling while admitting this. He was carrying on in his everyday life at school, surrounded by persons and children while having thoughts of killing himself and us. He was getting mental health therapy while thinking these thoughts. Remember this while I proceed to tell you the struggle I've had trying to find protection for youngest daughter. Our court system knew his mental health issues, about his forty plus guns, his anger management issues and the concern I had for her because of violence in the home.

Since 2006 I was seeking help for this man in an attempt to keep our family together. I have felt firsthand with my first divorce what divorce can do to children emotionally, financially and

spiritually. I would not have wanted divorce for my three children. His family fostered my husband's poor choices and gave their son a place to run away to, overdose on drugs, and run away with guns to. Despite countless abusive (physical, emotional, verbal, psychological) accounts against my children and myself I continued to seek out help for him and to keep the marriage together while trying to do my best to safe-guard my children. Last winter he ran away for the last time I would allow and he filed divorce papers which he then tried to get stopped because it was more of his psychological acting out than what he really wanted to do.

My first trip into court was to review access for my husband for our daughter. Persons who knew him and were scared for my family's safety, and especially for my little girl's safety, thought for sure he would get supervised visitation. Instead family relations discounted what I said and gave him a preschooler to be with four afternoons a week. Those who thought it would be supervised visitation are college educated persons, some were social workers. Family Relations set up the drop-offs and pick-ups at his family's house where he is residing. They set my daughter and I and my children up for disaster. For over a month with his daughter standing in the yard while he ignored her and sometimes with my older children in the car he yelled at me, threw things at my car, hit the car, tried to pry open doors, and made threatening calls to me while I was driving away. I spoke up to my lawyer and was told repeatedly to "ignore" it. I was ignoring it and he was escalating and I was reporting it and nothing was changing. Without going into all the details in the spring of last year I showed up to get my daughter after a visitation with her dad and he snapped. Swearing at me he ran towards me, I tried to run into my car, I got in and was using my phone to call 911. He grabbed my phone after going over the two front seats I was stretched over, broke the phone in half and threw it at my face. As he backed away from the car I got the door shut and locked. He was yelling throughout and hitting my car while my poor preschool daughter stood on the grass scared. He finally went away from the car and I got my daughter in to the car and proceeded to call 911 while he continued to hit the car and scream at us from outside. I told my daughter it would be all right. The police came and when all was said and done we were both arrested. The arresting officer stated I would thank her for this. Thanking her has never entered my mind. I have been a law abiding citizen who has taught my children the difference between right and wrong and if our judicial system honestly thinks that I want to deal with domestic violence by being arrested because they set me up in a situation they shouldn't have in the first place, that I will be happy telling my employer that I need to go to court because I've been arrested, because I'm going to seek help while dealing with a mentally disturbed individual whom I can't possibly have any control over.....none of this, including what that officer said to me, makes good sense.

I and those who know my husband understand the potential threat he is. I have spent thousands of dollars trying to do the right thing, to get protection for my daughter, myself and my two other children. I am speaking up because I worry about the woman who doesn't have the ability, self-esteem, money or the know-how to speak up. When I talked to the victim's advocate at the Court House a few weeks ago and was telling her some of what I experienced, I asked her if there was an ethics committee I could discuss this with. She told me there was none and what she could

offer me was a crisis hotline number. When I think of the treatment my children and I have received, and I will acknowledge that the police station location for visitation pick-up and drop-offs was good, I consider a lot of the treatment less than adequate. I have an excellent lawyer who has represented me in the best manner that he can but the system, on a whole, seems disabling in regards to the family with domestic violence, mental health issues and the safe guarding of victims. I can't help but thinking about the consumer who can make a complaint about me to the department of health and the accountability I have in my day to day job. If I told my clients I didn't know how to get the medication or treatment their loved one is expecting, if I ignored their requests and correspondences all together or if I told them some insulting remark which I have had more than once by a respected lawyer and advocate ("that's what happens when you make babies," "you need to put your big girl pants on."), if I knowingly placed them in harm's way and figured I'd not get involved when problems were occurring, I wouldn't have a job. Is it acceptable for a court appointed psychologist who is highly regarded to have heard my husband admit to a death threat against me and then pretend that it didn't even happen? Is it acceptable for me to be asked by him to record all questionable behaviors, then tell me past behaviors don't matter and then tell me to report only current behaviors and then to disregard those behaviors? Is it okay for court orders to be put into place and say they will be strictly enforced and then when they aren't to have one reason after another as to why they aren't enforced (such as too much time elapsed before the attorney found out or we can't address every issue, and I need to ignore his behaviors)? While seeking protection for my daughter a solution that the guardian ad litem offered for my safety was for my daughter's father to take her from Friday after school till Monday morning where she would then go to her babysitters. She would be spending 60+hours every other weekend with a mentally unbalanced, unsupervised man and everyone one of the lawyers found this to be a viable option. When I protested they were looking at me like I am unreasonable. My child's guardian ad-litem said to me if he (her father) could hurt her in two hours than what difference does twenty-four hours make? Is it just me or does anyone see how twisted and disregarding this is? What hurts the most is the feeling that I am powerless in the end to a system that I have no control over. I have found little accountability and greater protection of the rights of the abuser with mental health issues than for the concern of the victims who at the least will be scarred by mental, emotional, psychological abuse and at most may be harmed physically, even possibly lethally.

The great attempts that have been made, thanks to his well paid lawyer, to paint my husband as an average man who is a little off because of divorce procedures rather than the ever unstable always unpredictable, possibly suicidal or homicidal individual with a small child and a wife at his disposal that he has issues with has been surreal not only for myself but for a whole community of people that have been standing at the side lines watching this. The lawyers have repeatedly referred to his behaviors as "normal divorce behavior." This normal divorce behavior would include taping me without my knowledge and playing them in court, at my church where he forced people to listen to them and other forums as well. He has tampered with my personal data, and discontinued utility services with no punishment. He called into the recovery room at a hospital when I was there for surgery under Jane Doe and no one could figure out how he had

been able to call into that number. He has showed up six hours late for a drop off and threatened me at the police station where pick-ups and drop-offs occur at this time and when reported to the lawyers nothing changed, nothing happened. He has also followed me out to my car, and continues to try to engage in conversation despite a court order stating this should not be happening. He continues to say negative things about me at my child's school despite a court order stating this is not allowed. The lawyers and the court appointed psychologist I am stating involvement with these concerns are each highly respected. There have been discussions about moving the pick-ups and drop-offs away from the police station and giving my husband more time alone with our daughter. Without the court system helping me to protect myself and my family, my children and I will continue to suffer from his harassment and abuse. Despite threats, aggressive actions and abuse of my daughter by my husband I continue to be in a position of having to try to defend my daughter and self in a system that seems to want me to just look the other way. This "normal" man has had years of irresponsible and unbalanced behaviors and my fear, as it is of others as well, is that he is the next one who will sadly put our family on the front page. What I don't want to have happen is hearing, "we tried to warn them," "we all saw it coming," "I wish there was something I could have done."

For the protection of my children and myself despite the ignorance and downplaying of this situation by professionals in the judicial system, which I feel is more from a lack of education about domestic abuse and that they don't know what to do, I will continue to seek out help for us within the framework of our judicial system. I hope that you are doing everything in your power to help make this a better system for all the woman and children who are counting on you. No matter what our calling professionally it has always been my understanding that we must remember to be respectful to each other while serving the greater good. I believe our state can make improvement in the area of domestic violence. We need to get going in that direction. In ten years time I see little improvement and neither do those I know. Please consider this cause worthy of your undivided attention.

Respectfully,

A Connecticut mother and taxpayer.