

Raised House Bill No. 6629, An Act Concerning Domestic Violence

Written Testimony by Robln Shapiro

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony once again.

On a Sunday night in October of 2007, our world abruptly changed and the violence with which we had lived escalated and we needed help. While my 10 year old screamed for him to stop, my oldest daughter, 18, *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 a court system that just doesn't have a clear understanding of domestic violence or what is needed to truly keep us safe.

In my case, my husband assaulted his sister, his step-daughter and his wife. His first arrest was in April, 2004 and he was given anger management. He was arrested 5 times between that original incident and April 2008 and police reports were filed in 2 other incidents. He was given anger management again, was given and then withdrawn from family violence due to the continued arrests and sent to the Evolve Program.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 a protective order. He appeared before the same judge for both women at the same time. And was given the SAME classes and orders in BOTH cases while violating the orders that were already in place.

All victims are invited to come forward and speak. I did. He would show up for court and start taking his classes. He was still violating the orders. I would try to inform the judge about all the different cases and violations not just in my case, but in all cases...trying to tie it all in for her. He was even issued a DUI while in classes which require monitoring of substance abuse but it was in another district and did not show. None of that was admissible until trial. I was afraid we would never get to trial...at least not without myself, my children or one of the other women being severely hurt...or worse. I had police officers, lieutenants, victim advocates and prosecutors all asking the court for protection for us. The system wasn't protecting us.

He was sentenced and served 90 days. And I was given a Standing Criminal Restraining Order. 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, the judge would let him back out.

Ultimately, he cornered me exactly where he said he would leave me dead...in my front lawn. My husband took off for 3 weeks and eventually turned himself in. His cases were combined and he was sentenced, on a cap, at the end of May and served 6 months violating the conditions of release by coming to my house.

I am speaking out today supporting limiting diversion for family violence to one time. Offenders do not deserve multiple "get out of jail frees". This puts victims at risk and does not send a clear message of ZERO TOLERANCE for abuse. We do not parent our children without consequences because they never learn not to repeat the same mistakes. How can we expect these offenders to learn that we... the victims, the police, the courts...mean business?

The system has a duty to protect us and not keep sending these offenders back out to continue to commit these acts of violence.

I also strongly support making offenders enter into a conditional plea...and holding the court system responsible with following through.

Each time he violated meant waiting for another arraignment and another pre-trial. At one point, I believe we had approximately 6 pre-trials waiting for the initial assaults and violations of the protective orders with myself and 2 with the other woman. Plus the DUI pretrial while in a program, which has a requirement for substance abuse monitoring, for the domestic violence and violation of protective order charges.

We need to be pro-active not re-active.

We need to send a strong message that this will no longer be tolerated on any level and we must follow through with punishments that reinforce that message.

To break the cycle of abuse we need to change the mindsets of the people and it starts with YOU. The judicial system.

You are our resource and we need your help.

Thank you.