

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary,

I support SB-442, "An Act Concerning Court Proceedings Involving Allegations of Family Violence and Domestic Abuse". I urge you to protect families by supporting it also.

The Dulos story is **not** unique. Jennifer's story is my story, too. I've been actively trying to escape a volatile and dangerously controlling relationship since 2013 which keeps managing to live on in various Family Courts. My daughters, now nearly 15 and 12, have lived more years of their childhoods tethered to legal proceedings than without. The proposed changes in this bill are needed now to spare Connecticut families from headlines or from courtrooms which have been weaponized by abusers.

About a year and a half into my Connecticut proceedings, after many suicide threats by D and later his attempt at emergency sole custody of our young girls, I came upon a stark reality: the only thing more horrifying than staying married to someone like D was trying to divorce someone like him. Professionals warned me of certain dangers that existed for me and the girls. I was also warned of the likelihood D would create reasons to take me back to court in perpetuity.

In my case, D was ultimately diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and some opine he could be sociopathic. He is highly manipulative, to a shocking degree, and his behavior has not improved with time. I know there is no length D will not go in order to hurt me or achieve a perceived a "win".

Some abusers ensure their victims pay a price to pay for leaving. Seven years later, I'm still paying mine. Our girls are paying too. I fear the ultimate cost.

I share my **attached narrative** to inform the Committee on real examples of ongoing coercive control and psychological abuse. In singularity, one event alone might not rise to the level of perceived danger or significant abuse, yet the overall pattern is extremely disturbing and created insidious fear. I hope it illustrates why the current definition of abuse must be expanded.

Jennifer Dulos was doing her best within the current system. It continues to be my biggest daily struggle...to navigate protecting myself and my girls without being perceived as a "problem parent" in court (thus possibly risking removal of custody), paranoid to others, or half of a "high-conflict couple". To be grouped together with the abuser, or worse...to have to defend oneself against false accusations of alienation...is wrong and invalidating to victims. It's also hurtful and extremely confusing to their children.

This legislation is urgent to pass now. Please vote to give Family Courts the tools they need. Do not let the story of Jennifer Dulos or the Connecticut women before her (Helle Crafts, Barbara Hamburg and countless others) stay contained in headlines or statistics alone. Vote to pass SB-422 and help families now. Please help mine.

Sincerely,

M, Fairfield CT

M's Personal Narrative: Patterns of Coercive Control & Psychological Abuse

I'll begin in lower Fairfield County in 2013. For years, there were only occasional episodes of physical abuse (pushing, bending my thumb back, throwing a glass across the room at me, spitting on me and choking). However, it was the ongoing emotional abuse, extreme control and manipulation, and escalating threats that created a tipping point and left me most fearful.

D had a history of taking my phone and purse when angry, and cancelling my phone service. In front of the girls and others on Christmas morning, D lashed out at me in a verbal rage, called me names and threatened to take the girls away. The girls were crying in the corner.

Jan/Feb 2013 My oldest daughter, aged 7, asked me as I tucked her in "will Daddy ever kill you?" I immediately got the girls in therapy. Their father was upset by this.

Feb/Mar 2013 We saw a couple's therapist, TR, who after a few sessions said we could never work on our relationship while D displayed such anger and disdain for me. This enraged D more as he argued with the therapist I was to blame. I was later advised by TR to create a safety plan for the girls and myself. Friends and family had already suggested this to me and to research local women's shelters.

May/June 2013 My daughter's question changed to "will Daddy ever kill me or E?" (her sister). At that point, I would sometimes sleep in one of their rooms in efforts to avoid volatile arguments D began initiating late at night, especially if I sensed his mood was dark.

May/June 2013 A relative of D's informed me D installed a keylogger on a computer I was using. That relative instructed me not to disclose my safety plan electronically. I learned D was stalking me, sometimes taking the girls with him to "find Mommy" around town (at the public beach, at the town library) and to the homes of my friends and cousin. D admitted to one friend he had been tracking me in my phone and knew I called her hours earlier.

June 2013 D was offered a job in Rhode Island and I suggested a separation could be good for us. As always, I chose my words carefully as to not set D off. In response, D said he was taking all of our money, liquidating stocks and said "good luck paying your bills or finding a place to live". D cancelled our lease without my knowledge or consent and emptied the bank accounts.

June/July 2013 I filed for a legal separation in Stamford Family Court. I was afraid of D's reaction by filing for a divorce, and had to secretly take out a loan and buy a separate cell phone to communicate with an attorney. The day before I filed, D had already moved to RI yet I found him standing over my bed in the dark around 2 a.m. He shoved a recorder in my face and was visibly upset & erratic. He then went upstairs and whispered something to each girl. I could not hear what it was.

July 2013 D was served and I received his first explicit threat of suicide via text. He was going to jump off his apartment building and there was a note on his laptop for "K & E". I called the police to check on D but he told them I was making it up and out to get him.

Summer-Early Fall 2013 D's various threats continued with regularity...he was going to kill himself by mixing chemicals in buckets, putting them in his car and rolling the windows up (I later found the buckets, products and receipt from Home Depot), by hanging himself on the paddle courts, and finally by buying a gun. His threats tended to ramp up closer to court dates, and he blamed me that if I didn't call off the action, it would be my fault the girls didn't have a father. If I called his brother or friends, he would text me I was just "accelerating it". If I called the police, he would tell them nothing was wrong, that I was fabricating it.

D hadn't cooperated in disclosing any financial information. When I looked into things, I discovered D had forged my electronic signature on some documents to close accounts.

Oct 2013 I learned D had been having an affair and changed the action to a divorce. The threats increased significantly and D called me saying he was driving to NH to buy a gun. I asked why NH and he said he found a guy on Craigslist to buy it from...that the gun laws were lax there.

During this time, I also discovered D had deleted most of the electronic journals I had written about being afraid of his concerning behaviors or troubling events.

Holidays 2013 I did not know if D bought a gun or not. I became scared when he started including the girls and I would have to watch him "blow his brains out" on Skype. D blamed me constantly and I knew it wasn't a stretch to think he could turn a weapon on me or God forbid, the girls. I was walking a very fine line, it felt, of protecting the girls while also trying desperately not doing anything that would set D off.

I reluctantly filed for "reconciliation status" and told D I'd agree to looking into life in RI by researching schools and places to live, contingent on him seeing a therapist. I wanted to de-escalate the situation and also encourage D to get the help I could see he desperately needed.

D suggested to even the score of his infidelity, I could have sex with as many people as I wanted for a period of months. When I didn't respond favorably, D told me he'd already researched and found people on the internet for me.

Feb/Mar 2014 D had been sending me listings for houses in RI and eventually, there was one he wanted to buy. I voiced my opposition to D, and discussed it with him in sessions with MA but he forged ahead. My attorney SG advised that if D was insisting on buying a house, my name should be on it. D secured a mortgage so I went to the closing to ensure my name was on the title.

My daughter heard D on the phone in a conversation about a gun while I was on a trip. Her therapist's notes indicate the creation of a safety plan, especially for when I was out of town for work.

Spring/Summer 2014 I reminded D I could not move across state lines with a pending divorce action and that I would not call it off this time. On our wedding anniversary, D was very unstable on the phone. I asked him to please stay away. Instead, he drove from RI to CT only to take the kids on a walk and tell them I hated him, that it was our anniversary but I didn't want to see him and then sped off, damaging his car. Later, K asked "will I ever see daddy again?" and "he was talking like we are never going to see him again".

One girl began having soiling issues during sleep if I was out of town.

D threatened his brother by saying that if T didn't encourage me to get back together with D and stay in the marriage, D would tell everyone T molested him as a child. T warned his colleagues about D calling, and T expressed concerns for his own safety to me.

Threats of harm to me were implied or vague like "I'm gonna get you" while standing over me, angry and pointing in my face at the family dinner table or "you'd better watch your back". D outright threatened to kill a close family friend of mine. In various ways, D used direct intimidation or threats with five or more of my family members or friends.

Summer 2014 We met with at least 3 mediators to finalize our divorce in CT but D was finding excuses to stall. After one meeting, D was still very upset and caused such an issue in a Westport parking lot that K, then aged 9, went to a nearby police car for help.

D insisted on a moving truck coming for all our belongings in Darien, despite both my opposition and the RI house being fully furnished. D told me he would lose 10K from his employer if the moving truck did not come. To spare the girls from another public display on our lawn and possibly more police involvement, I decided not to fight and instead kept only basic things for me and the girls to stay in CT as needed.

D implored me to quit my job at a major airline, which I had since 1996. He insisted my part time flying interfered too much in our family life and he wanted me to stay at home. I nearly did until I realized I was suddenly becoming more and more isolated.

While sitting with E in a Stamford church pew, I received my first ever email from K who was in RI. I didn't even know she knew how to email. She wrote "Daddy is being really mean and scary". And then 8 blank pages later, "REALLY SCARY". I later learned she was hiding in the basement to write that.

D enrolled the girls in school in RI. I learned he would say things to them like "If you stay in CT with your mom, you won't have a dad anymore" and "If you come to RI, I will buy you a puppy".

D had a history of taking his aggression out on me, not being able to consider what it would do to the girls. Once, before a bike ride I was taking with the girls, he was angry and said "wait to see what I do to your bike". I thought he was going to let air out of my tires. After checking them, I strapped E in her bike seat, and tried to pedal off only to find out D had slipped the chain off my bike, causing us to fall. Another time while D was driving, he was upset and shouting at me in the car, speeding fast on small, windy roads causing the girls to sob hysterically in the back seat.

Despite D's commitment to seeing a therapist and taking medication, his behavior was taking a turn for the worse.

Aug 2014 I discovered while D did fill a prescription, he wasn't taking it. I contacted my attorney SG to file a motion but she was on vacation. She was concerned where things were headed and suggested maybe I needed a litigator. D continued to blow off appointments we had set up with a mediator.

September 11, 2014 Emergency Sole Custody Hearing, Stamford Family Court, Judge Colin presiding. After being a non-participating party for over a year, D suddenly hired a litigator and threatened sole custody if I did not comply with his demands. D claimed I was an unfit parent. Immediately after the hearing didn't go his way, D asked me to come back to the marriage again and move to RI. I asked how he could have lied under oath by testifying I was not a good mother (something he repeatedly praised me for being). He replied that part of being a good mother was being a good wife. And that I hadn't been a good wife.

At our first "visitation exchange", D had a few boxes of my belongings out on an empty parking lot at the Mystic Aquarium. As I pulled up with the girls, they started crying when they saw all of my underwear and bras scattered about the blacktop. Humiliation was something D seemed to employ often and if it was in front of others, he appeared to relish it. For years, friends of ours would comment that his cutting remarks and treatment of me made them uncomfortable. (They eventually stopped getting together with us.)

I learned D cut off my access to bank accounts and my credit card when I went for gas and groceries.

Fall 2014 The suicide threats began in earnest again. I had seen first-hand what D was capable of and the lengths he was willing to go. I was exhausted and traumatized after a year and a half of D's escalating threats and the various legal proceedings, including his attempt at sole custody amidst his chaotic instability. This was when I realized divorcing D might be the only thing worse than staying married to D.

D floated the idea of a postnuptial agreement and assembled financial spreadsheets and other details. We began meeting with a mediator to explore this while I also continued with legal proceedings. Ultimately, we completed the Postnup under CT law and I felt it gave me certain protections. However, the Postnup required the girls and I move away from CT. It seemed like my best option at the time, and yet again, I thought it would de-escalate D's heightened threats. The Postnup included D was to complete an evaluation from the Borderline Personality Disorder Institute at NY Presbyterian Hospital. JD (Norwalk) was scheduled to consult with us 3 times and ultimately told me she felt D was probably sociopathic, his prognosis was very grim and she could no longer continue based on his remarks and actions. D never completed the evaluation.

Shortly after our move, D told me he only said what he did to "trick" the girls and I into leaving CT. His behavior became more erratic and outright frightening. It appeared he was trying to "flip the script" and attempting to create a false record. For example, one morning, we were gathered as a family to watch a movie. As the credits rolled, I saw an email from D which he sent during the movie. His email described my behavior as "scary" and "bizarre" which was not possible considering we were all quietly together in front of the t.v. Afterwards, the girls went to the basement to play. They later came to me and said "Daddy came downstairs and told us you are scary to us. It's not true...why would he say that?"

Once, I was lying on the couch watching the late news when D whispered if I tried for anything other than 50/50 custody, he would go for sole custody again and threatened he had more than enough evidence to do it. D told me I made up all of his suicide threats...that they never happened. Other times, I would wake to D whispering something hateful in my ear in the middle of the night. D then turned on his phone to record me rolling over awake, seeming to taunt or try to illicit a response from me for the camera. Once when D was yelling and cussing at me in front of the girls, I locked the door behind him after he left to go on a bike ride. He pounded on the door threatening to call the police. I asked D if he needed anything and offered to pass it through the window, but encouraged D to go ahead with his bike ride as planned and cool off. I passed D a water bottle through the window, just in case.

D did call the police and the girls were frightened. K asked "what if Daddy tells them lies about you?" The police escorted D into the house. He slowly added ICE to the water and left. D asked the officer to create a report without talking to me. The officer told him it didn't work that way.

D began withdrawing large amounts of cash, engaging with prostitutes and things at home became absolutely untenable.

I filed for divorce again in RI in May of 2015 and D told me it would be war. Although the girls and I were recently permitted to move back to CT and I was given sole custody, my nightmare is far from over. I'm still not divorced and D is ramping up more legal proceedings and maneuverings. He files emergency motions and contempt motions every few weeks and recently gave notice of appeal. In January 2020, D asked for an Amber Alert to be issued when he falsely accused me of kidnapping the girls.

Despite an order of protection put in place after his suicide note, D continued to call, text and email me incessantly, stalk me physically and with a tracking device on my car, & I discovered another tracking program installed on a new home computer. Female friends of D's sent me raging emails full of profanity, came surreptitiously to my front door, followed me around the courthouse and once physically attacked me in the presence of my daughters. I do not know if D directed this or if they did it of their own accord, on his behalf. D emailed me gloating about the details of the attack, though. He would scream at me from my driveway or across the parking lot at the girls' school, he would bang on the windows of my home and a few times came into the house or backyard without permission when I was not home, once breaking the latch on the front door. He would follow me at school events and once pressed up behind me there, whispered threats and talked of having me "black-balled" socially. He would follow me in court calling me "douche bag" and on a break followed me into and around Au Bon Pain, loudly calling me names, blaming and berating me there.

After years of repeated advice from local police, and just after D discontinued my heat and car insurance without my knowledge, I filed for a RO in December 2018. It was denied.

I filed again after a handgun was found hidden in the basement of my home, in Dec 2019. The RO was granted, however D refutes the gun was his. A trace of the gun found it was purchased on my birthday years prior from a man in NH. Next to the gun was a box of bullets and an old black t-shirt, size L from a gym where D used to work out.

The gun was found within feet of where my girls would often hide from their dad when I was not home and they were afraid. The presence of a gun is haunting and I now view many incidents of the past as "near misses" for the girls and I.

The RO hearings were gut-wrenching for me. For nearly a decade, I learned it was critical to never let D smell fear, knowing he would capitalize on any of his tactics that he perceived "worked".

D still continues his patterns of abuse and manipulation, described above. Some significant events from the past several years to the present include:

--Suicide note police found written to the girls in 2015 blaming me. This was in response to D being served with RI divorce papers. He came to confront me and was extremely volatile and unstable. He directed me to different rooms in the house, telling me to close the door and not come out, while I could hear him moving around, gathering things. There were moments I thought I was going to die.

--Hospitalization. He asked me what I would say to the discharge doctor and when I told him I would be honest, D told me he would have to "find someone else" for the doctor to talk to. Hospital notes reflected a very large amount of cash and a passport. They also included a diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, among other things.

--Girls called the police on a visit, scared of D. D's attorney requested the recording but never used it in court. Other times, the girls would hide in the closet, afraid and unable to eat on visits.

--D "tackled" my oldest daughter while visiting his relatives on the west coast when she tried to call me at the scheduled time.

--D told the girls at the last minute they could not attend a party, and then recorded them crying. K asked why he was recording and he said "so I can show the GAL and Dr. P how bad you treat me on visits".

--Hospital Social Worker, SF, intervened when my daughter had an appendectomy. D was restricted two times, based on his behavior at the hospital. Clinician notes reflect K's comments of feeling "unsafe" with her dad sometimes.

--Girls' therapist Dr. P reported emotional abuse to DCYF.

--Girls would come home from some visits sobbing, sometimes unable to speak. Once, D had told them we would be homeless because of me. A few times ran to my car, hysterical and begging me to drive away quickly.

--D was required to have supervised visits for 2 different periods of time, totaling approximately 3 years.

--D suddenly swerved and nearly hit me with his car on a visitation exchange

--D cut me off from finances & concealed money, D didn't follow court orders. D was found by the Court to be not credible on many matters and purposefully misled the Court (Decision dated 12/17/19).

--D cancelled a life insurance policy, and when ordered to take steps to re-instate it, D instead wrote to the insurance company fraud was occurring.

--It seems D targets our children more and more since he cannot target me as easily. Professionals have opined he has no empathy for the girls; that he views them as possessions.

--Visits were called "emotionally damaging" by girls' therapist, Dr. P. K had a full panic attack before one visit and developed other anxiety issues. Dr. E reports D is manipulative on video calls causing difficulty for the girls. Last summer, as supervision ended, E began vomiting after visits, and recently it's happened before or during visits.

--D revoked his consent for the girls' therapist and then told the girls Dr.P didn't want to see them anymore. He threatened several clinicians, and once told Amex he didn't recognize PO's charges and had them reversed.

--We've been ordered for co-parenting counseling 4 times now (PO told me it will not work), the girls have interviewed with their third GAL, they were involved in 3 family interviews as part of psychological exams, DCYF interviews, and even interviewed with the Judge.

--D told the girls he was still doing "drive-bys" in the summer of 2019 (we lived on a dead-end street). Our realtor revealed D came by the house in a boat to "check the landscaping". In Oct 2019, when K wouldn't get out of the car fast enough for a visit, D kept approaching the car in anger and a few times opened the door attempting to grab her out.

--December 2019, K confided to me that visits were not good for her mentally, that she felt she could no longer go but she worried D would hurt me if she didn't.

It's difficult for me to recount some of this, but I need to be more than a victim. I vowed to eventually use my experience to help other families in similar positions. In Jennifer's honor, I sure hope I can.

Thank you, Senator Kasser, for bringing this important Bill forward.