

**MINUTES OF JANUARY 21, 2022  
PUBLIC HEARING OF THE  
TASK FORCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Domestic Violence Task Force met on Friday, January 21, 2022, at the New Hampshire Supreme Court with the meeting called to order by Justice Hantz Marconi at 1:02 p.m.

**The following members attended:**

Justice Anna Barbara Hantz Marconi  
Merrill Beauchamp  
Kathy Beebe  
Hon. Susan Carbon  
Pam Dodge  
Steven Endres  
Sarah Freeman  
Marcia Hornick  
Erin Jasina  
Jean Kilham  
Mary Krueger

Patricia LaFrance  
Lynda Ruel  
Amanda Grady Sexton  
Jon Strasburger??  
Anne Zinkin

Lisa Merrill, Recording Secretary

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Justice Hantz Marconi called the meeting to order and welcomed members of the public thanking them for their participation. She noted that the meeting is being recorded and the proceedings are being livestreamed.

Justice Hantz Marconi asked those who wish to speak to use the sign-up sheet located in the front lobby. She explained that the Task Force welcomes written comments, which may be sent by mail or by email at [DVTaskForceComments@courts.state.nh.us](mailto:DVTaskForceComments@courts.state.nh.us). There is also a call center number to use if interested in speaking with a member of the Task Force. The number is 1-855-212-1234 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The following individuals provided testimony:

Dr. Rhonda Hodge: Dr. Hodge is a longtime mental health counselor working in the Salem area. She testified that she no longer advises her clients to leave relationships where domestic violence is present. She outlined the following concerns:

- Insufficient judge training in domestic violence. There is no way for a judge to understand the complexities of domestic violence in order to make good decisions.
- Protocols do not work for victims.
- Devices, such as cell phones, watches, and other technology make it easier for abusers to track victims.

Alan Cronheim, Esq.: Attorney Cronheim thanked members of the Task Force for the opportunity to speak on behalf of New Hampshire Criminal Defense Lawyers. He has worked with many members of the Task Force in the past. He shared the following:

- Supports the court orders and opinions.
- Due process is critical when assessing domestic violence protocols.
- Amend the need for a 30-day window on restraining orders issued in the superior court.

- Statute reform - concern about the types of cases that fall under the domestic violence statute.

Kathryn Jones: Ms. Jones shared her own experience with domestic violence after fleeing a relationship many years ago. She now works as an advocate for hundreds of women and believes that NH family courts have let victims of domestic violence down. She believes there is a correlation between the special needs of children and domestic violence in the home. She urged members of the Task Force to consider establishing family councils that would support judges by providing training and education.

Dana Albrecht: Mr. Albrecht is a resident of Nashua with four children. He shared his experiences with allegations of domestic violence and the NH family courts. He asked the Task Force to consider the following:

- Appellate decisions should be posted on the NH Judicial Branch website.
- Revision of court forms to include check boxes and detail about the law(s) violated.
- Increase legal resources for both parties.
- Consider criminal penalties for individuals who falsely file a domestic violence petition.

Erica Austin: Ms. Austin shared her personal experiences with the court system as a domestic violence survivor. She believes that the courts are broken and that judges need more accountability.

Vivian Girard: Ms. Girard submitted written documents in addition to her in person testimony regarding her experience with domestic violence allegations. She is a business owner with children. Ms. Girard shared the following concerns with the Task Force:

- Cases that languish in the court system, including her own.
- Criminal penalties for individuals who falsely file a domestic violence petition.
- Legality of filing frivolous court motions.

Dave Smith: Mr. Smith provided testimony as an individual accused of domestic violence. He echoed similar issues shared by speakers before him:

- Criminal penalties for individuals who falsely file a domestic violence petition.
- Equal protection and due process violations.
- RSA 173-b reform (alleges that it harms innocent people who are falsely accused).

Ashley Stowers: Ms. Stowers shared her experience as a survivor of domestic violence. She shared the following concerns:

- Enforcement of restraining orders.
- Sentencing reform to include no contact with victim.
- Notification to victim when abuser has completed sentence.
- Improve access to legal assistance for pro se litigants.
- The domestic violence process does not fit all situations.
- Increased training for judges.
- Victims are often re-traumatized by the court system.

Gary Apfel, Esq.: Attorney Apfel practices in Lebanon, NH and has worked as a trial lawyer and public defender. He shared the following concerns about victims and defendants:

- Stereotyping.
- Equal protection and due process.
- Access to legal services should apply to both parties.
- Form improvement to include check boxes and the narrative.
- It is difficult to define financial or emotional abuse.

Christine Monigle: Ms. Monigle shared her experience as a survivor of domestic violence in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. She expressed the following concerns:

- Improve interstate communication.
- Improve treatment of victims who come before the court.
- Enforcement of orders.
- Improve training for judges, counselors, and GAL's.

Betty Gay: Betty is a NH State Representative and shared her experience working with women who encounter the NH judicial system and the family courts in particular. Representative Gay covered the following topics:

- Judge accountability.
- Reform the family courts.
- Increase training of judges, GAL's and court staff.
- Enforce restraining orders
- Stop reunification therapy.
- Length of time it takes to get a restraining order to the time it takes to get a final hearing is a problem.
- Improve forms.
- GAL reform.
- Supports increased funding for the Judicial Branch to implement improvement.

Sarah Heidebrecht: Ms. Heidebrecht is a survivor of domestic violence, a mother, and an advocate for women. She shared her experience as a survivor working with the court system and proposed the following recommendations for the Task Force to consider:

- Update the definition of abuse to include emotional abuse, coercive control, and post-separation abuse.
- Create new legislation and laws that protect children.
  - Admonish the term "high conflict" which implies that both parents are the issue.
  - Require judges to notify survivors in all family cases that mediation is not mandatory.
  - Protect survivors in discovery requests.
  - Remove the "friendly parent" statute 461-A:6(g).
  - Eliminate co-parenting counseling orders by judges and GALs for individuals with a history of domestic violence.
- Educate and train judges with modern research.
  - Consider implementing a domestic violence specific court with highly trained professionals.
  - Improve the gender balance in all judiciary positions.
- Update protocols, licensing and enforcement for abuser's intervention programs.
- Admonish attorneys and judicial officers and hold them to higher standards.
  - Stop attorneys and judges from perpetuating false stereotypes.

- Report attorneys and judges for conduct and hold them accountable.
- Apply genuine consequences and recommendations.
- Provide better resources for pro se litigants.
- Review the gun statute.
- Partner with DCYF.
  - Remove the DCYF anonymous number.
  - Require police to immediately report to DCYF if a minor was present at a DV incident or arrest.
  - Ask DCYF to follow-up and conduct welfare checks of family and children.
- Prosecute individuals who falsely report domestic violence or child abuse.
- Improve training for DCYF and the Ombudsman's Office on domestic violence.

Ms. Heidebrecht also submitted her testimony in writing which is part of the record.

Justice Hantz Marconi thanked everyone for sharing his or her experiences, thoughts, and recommendations with the Task Force. She reminded the audience that they could submit comments or recommendations to the Task Force in writing by email at [DVTaskForceComments@courts.state.nh.us](mailto:DVTaskForceComments@courts.state.nh.us)

With no further business to come before the Task Force, the meeting adjourned at 3:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Merrill, Recording Secretary