

NH Commission on the Status of Men

Revised Minutes

Public Meeting: February 25, 2004

12:00-3:00 PM Keene State College

Notes taken by Scott A. Garman. Modified in italics by M Geanoulis

Present: Gerry Boyle, Joe Mastromarino, Larry Colby, Michael Geanoulis, Scott Garman *Absent: Tony Raymond, Stephen Gorin, Ron Blankenstein*

[Some discussion was had on publicizing the public meetings. A few audience members indicated that they had heard of the meeting through a *Keene Sentinel* announcement.]

Joe Mastromarino brought up issues regarding moving the meetings around the state, and how this potentially keeps the group from gaining momentum that it otherwise might attain if it were located in one reliable place. Gerry Boyle responded with a great deal of positive feedback he had received from state representatives, senators, the Executive Council, and Governor Benson regarding the current policy of moving the meeting location throughout the state. M Geanoulis suggested more lead time on meeting times/places was needed for other bulletin board services around the state and for accepting donations to the Commission.

Scott Garman addressed the Commission regarding web site issues. The web site mission statement needed a minor modification. It was agreed that links to the following web sites would be added to the Resources page on the NHCSM web site: VIP/SAFE-NH, Monadnock Men's Resource Center, Granite Men, Men's Resource Center of Western Massachusetts, MaleDepression.com, *National Fatherhood Initiative*, *NH Chapter of the National Congress for Fathers & Children*. A bibliography of men's studies works will also be added, as well as an announcement of the Parent Outreach Project's support group for dads. A disclaimer will be added to this page which indicates that the NHCSM does not endorse any of these groups but lists them as a resource for people who might find them useful.

The minutes, once approved, shall be posted to the website to enhance communications with the public.

The CSM website address is www.nh.gov/csm

M. Geanoulis added that he would like to see three separate sections of the web site dedicated to the three main issues the Commission is to address: *Health/Suicide, Education, Fatherlessness*.

Joe Mastromarino discussed suicide rates and the Commission's intention to study causes of male suicide further. The NH male suicide rate is higher than the national average for males. 6-10 male suicides per month are typical in NH. Developing statistical standards is difficult due to limitations on what information is included on a death certificate. Joe examined the methodology that a British Columbia suicide study used. He has met with Tom Andrews, the Chief Medical Examiner of NH. Death certificate data does include contributing cause of death, but that information is not often filled out fully or specifically enough. Currently, a Microsoft Excel template is being developed by Beth Blankenstein to use in interviews of attempted suicides. A large amount of data will be gathered, such as mental health history, recent hospitalizations, medications, etc. There will be another meeting with Tom Andrews on March 16, 9 AM at Chief Medical Examiner's office, to review suicides that have occurred from January 2004 to present. Both male and female suicides will be included.

There were two moving contributions by audience members who have interest in the topic of suicide. One young man spoke about his attempted suicide and how many of the factors Joe has included in this study were things he had dealt with, including a frustrating custody battle for his daughter and an undiagnosed mental illness that he did not have health insurance for. A second man discussed the way his father changed during WWII military service, which resulted in a distant

relationship with his father and some forms of abuse he suffered while growing up. He asked the Commission to take into account war service/parent military service as a potential factor in suicide.

Joe Nixon from Stratham volunteered to help with the suicide research.

Lee Newman volunteered to help with CSM committee work.

Joe Mastromarino made us aware that there is a Domestic Violence Fatality Committee (DVFC) which studies homicides when they are related to Domestic Violence. There was significant discussion over this issue. Since this is a complex problem and the purpose of the task force is to derive strategies to prevent or reduce fatalities, it was agreed that the Men's Commission has important input into causes and solutions. There was concern voiced about potential lack of representative views given the current composition of the committee. Mr. Boyle will look into having a representative from the Commission on the Status of Men appointed to the Committee

The agenda item on men's health issues was skipped due to the fact that the Commission member who was to address this was not present at the meeting.

M Geanoulis discussed the last Family Law Task Force Meeting. Mike is the NHCSM representative who sits on that Task Force. The last meeting was devoted to the topic of domestic violence. Lee Newman presented his VIP/SAFE-NH video. Amanda Brady from the NHCADV also presented a video which included the "Rule of Thumb" in its title. Some discussion was had on the fact that the supposed "rule of thumb" (where English law used to state that a man could beat his wife as long as he used a stick no thicker than his thumb) is a myth that has been debunked by Christina Hoff-Sommers *and others*. It was mentioned that the VIP video contained a great deal of statistical information, but that the NHCADV video did not contain much objective information.

Dr. Murray Straus also gave a presentation to the Family Law Task Force. Straus claimed that 8 or more domestic violence studies in Canada had their results attempted to be repressed by domestic violence advocacy groups *and that he and some of his colleagues had their very lives threatened because of publishing their findings on female abuse*. Nina Gardner asked Dr. Straus to consider developing some recommendations for improving the *treatment of domestic violence*, and he agreed. *A superior court marital master and district court judge were also scheduled to speak, but were postponed until the next FLTF meeting due to time*

constraints. The next meeting of the FLTF is March 19, 2004 at 1 PM in Room 208 of the LOB.

Michael Geanoulis also submitted a copy of a Cathy Young *Boston Globe* article on female perpetrators of domestic violence.

Paul Clements presented to the Commission a number of domestic violence news and editorial columns which support the fact that domestic violence is not a gender issue. Included was a bibliography of DV studies that show men are equally or more often victims of DV by women. Paul gave an overview of Straus' research, and he advocated changing domestic violence court cases from civil to criminal cases, a point that Gerry Boyle disagreed with due to the wide definition of criminal assault.

Finally, closing comments were made by the Commissioners. Michael Geanoulis expressed a renewed commitment to the cause of promoting the *importance of the research on the role of the father in child development*. Joe Mastromarino said he was looking forward to making more progress on his suicide research. Larry Colby expressed the need to ensure that the NHCSM and its research sources are objective. Gerry Boyle mentioned that the NH Commission on the Status of Women gives awards each year to graduating high school girls who are lettered in two varsity sports and have an overall GPA of B+ or better. Gerry feels that something similar for outstanding young men should also be done to recognize their achievements.

The meeting adjourned at 3:10 PM.

The next CSM meeting is scheduled for 9 AM, Wed, 31 March at the Institute for Politics Building, Saint Anselm's College, Goffstown.