

NH Commission on the Status of Men

Public Meeting: April 29, 2004

1:00-4:00 PM University of New Hampshire/Durham

Notes taken by Scott A. Garman

Commission Members Present: Dr. Joseph Mastromarino, Michael Geanoulis,

Contributors: Rep. David Bickford, Damien Licata and Jim Duffy of the Monadnock Men's Resource Center, Lee Newman of VIP/SAFE-NH and ten concerned members of the public including a reporter from Foster's Daily Democrat

Acting Secretary: Scott Garman

Vice Chair Joe Mastromarino ran the meeting this month, as Gerry Boyle was not able to make it. Also absent were Ron Blankenstein, Larry Colby, Stephen Gorin, and Tony Raymond. Therefore this meeting did not constitute a quorum and motions presented during it must be voted on at next month's meeting.

Michael Geanoulis presented a booklet Making Fathers Count, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and available at no cost. It presents vital statistics and information regarding the importance of father involvement in children's lives. Mike would like to see some of the research the booklet uses be included on the NHCSM web site. Interested individuals can order a copy of this booklet from the Annie E Casey Foundation by phone: 410-223-2890, or from www.aecf.org.

Male Suicide:

Joe Mastromarino continues to work with Tom Andrews, the Chief Medical Examiner of NH, on compiling new data for suicide cases in the state. Beth Blankenstein has recently completed the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet template to be used in taking survey data. The form will begin to be used by medical examiners as suicide cases come in. Joe mentioned that he is learning about a number of other research projects in the state which study suicide. He is discussing how to work

with these groups to identify what holes exist in the current data and how the interests of the Men's Commission overlap with theirs. Joe reports that these groups are very interested in sharing data with us. It was noted that the suicide rate in NH is approximately at a 10:1 ratio of male completed suicides to female completed suicides.

Joe recently discovered that data on suicide attempts is being tracked by the NH Hospital Association, which it gives to the Bureau of Statistics. Joe is attempting to get information such as marital status incorporated into these surveys.

Effie Malley and Chuck Rhodes will be presenting during the may NHCSM meeting. They are experts in the field of men's health, including suicide.

Education:

Mike Geanoulis suggested that the NHCSM form a working group on education issues. An audience member suggested that Fred Bramante, Chair of the Dept. of Education, should be invited to a Men's Commission meeting or contacted to help facilitate the Commission's research efforts. A number of suggestions were made regarding what statistics to gather, including: high school and college drop out rates, college enrollment, higher education enrollment by field of study, the gender distribution of teachers at various grade levels, the number of school programs geared exclusively toward either gender, father involvement in PTA groups, gender distribution of ADD/ADHD or other disorder coding in school systems.

Family Law Task Force:

Rep. David Bickford spoke about recent happenings with the Family Law Task Force. During the last meeting of the FLTF, Peggy Ward gave powerful testimony in favor of keeping both parents involved with their children after divorce. Massachusetts is instituting the notion of "parenting plans" to be created during a divorce, and that this is a new development that should be watched closely.

Mike Geanoulis, as a member of the FLTF, put forward a motion that the Men's Commission will recommend 50/50 joint physical custody preferably with parenting plans as a rebuttable presumption in child custody actions. This recommendation is consistent with the Commission's mission of promoting the importance of both parents, particularly fathers, in the lives of children.

Mike is also getting in contact with Prof. Tim Churchard, who is billed to be a specialist on the importance of biological fathers for children. Mike believes Prof. Churchard would make an excellent speaker for a future meeting of the Men's Commission.

Rep. David Bickford spoke of the lack of attendance at the most recent Child Support Study Committee (CSSC) hearing. The last meeting of the CSSC will be on May 13 in Plymouth, NH.

David mentioned that in NH, unlike other states, there is no cap on child support obligations. The discussions taking place in the CSSC are debating whether child support should be based on the cost to raise a child vs. the standard of living.

Lee Newman (VIP/SAFE-NH):

VIP/SAFE-NH has released their first quarterly newsletter, which includes important statistics on the number of cases they have handled. They are being "swamped" with phone calls for assistance. The overwhelming majority of calls have been from or about male victims, particularly heterosexual males. The NH Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which has the power to designate grantee status to crisis shelters, refuses to designate this status to VIP/SAFE-NH, despite the fact that all requirements of crisis shelters are being met.

Lee testified at a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) hearing in Washington, D.C, where it was confirmed that VAWA cannot be used to fund programs specifically for abused men. When the issue was raised about whether VAWA could be used to offer services for children of an abused parent, there was only discussion on whether this could be done in the name of helping girls. Although Lee's testimony at the hearing was welcomed, it was not acted upon.

A member of the audience mentioned that a conference on domestic and sexual violence, "Men and Women in Conversation" would be held in May in West Lebanon, NH. For more information, call 1-800-400-9638.

Dr. Murray Straus will be speaking on the topic of family violence research at the June 30 meeting of the Men's Commission in room 206 of the LOB.

Legislation:

Rep. David Bickford brought up a piece of legislation, SB526, which deals with sexual harassment claims made by state employees. In the bill's text it was noted that the Commission

on the Status of Women played a role in developing this legislation. However, the Men's Commission was not contacted or included in any form. David has contacted the Legislative Speaker's office to remind them of the existence of the Men's Commission and encouraged the Commission to do the same. Mike Geanoulis moved to write a letter from the Men's Commission to the Legislative Speaker's office to encourage them to include the Men's Commission regarding any legislation on gender issues. Joe Mastromarino seconded.

On May 3, David will be meeting with the Secretary of State regarding compiling new statistics on unmarried custody cases.

David showed a Legal Handbook for Women in NH, whose publication was funded by VAWA and the Department of Justice. He suggested that the Men's Commission consider drafting a similar handbook for men.

Michael Geanoulis noted that the Governor's Domestic Violence Fatality Committee reported the numbers of women who were assaulted but nothing about the numbers of men who were assaulted in the overview of their report which also included other inappropriate wording that made it seem as though men were the sole source of domestic violence. A similar problem exists in the preface of the domestic violence protocols distributed throughout the state and at the Attorney General's website: <http://doj.nh.gov/victim/pdf/dvintro.pdf>

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 PM.