

# NH Commission on the Status of Men

Public Meeting: May 26, 2004

1:00 – 3:45 pm

Legislative office Building, Room 208

## Approved Minutes

Commission members present: Gerard Boyle, Joe Mastromarino, Michael Geanoulis, Ron Blankenstein. Absent were Steve Gorin, Larry Colby, Tony Raymond.

Approval of Minutes: Revised February minutes were approved. Gerard Boyle added comments to his 'commissioner comments' section of the March Minutes. The March Minutes were then approved with changes and additions as noted. The April Minutes were also approved.

Gerard added additional comments regarding the proposed establishment of a statewide Family Division. The proposal has gone to the legislature for review and discussion. Gerard noted that the Family Division may become part of the district court system under this proposal. A Family Division Task Force has been established to make recommendations to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court by September 2004 on the possible implementation of the Family Division statewide.

Gerard urged the Commission to take a strong position on this issue after we have had further opportunity to discuss the issues and attend the hearings.

Gerard concluded his remarks by reminding Commissioners that most public complaints to this Commission have come from persons who have been in the Family Division in Grafton and Rockingham counties, suggesting that the shift to a statewide family division may not be in the best interest of men.

Joe noted that training of family division judges and masters continues to be a major concern. Mike noted that the Gosselin vs. Gosselin decision may be the root cause of current problems in that the decision gives great latitude to judges and masters in court.

### Commission Communication:

It was suggested and agreed that approval of minutes would be sought through email in order to expedite the process. Seven days would be allowed for initial review and seven more days allowed for changes and voting on an approved set of minutes.

Gerard circulated a letter to the Commissioners, a copy of which he received from a concerned citizen. The letter was sent to Dr. Marc Levenson, Director of the VA Medical

Center in Manchester and raised concerns about the sexist mental assault he endured while being treated at the Center.

Mike raised a concern about reimbursement for mileage. Gerard informed commissioners that they are now able to file reimbursement forms and can obtain necessary paperwork from our Treasurer, Larry Colby.

Mike noted the Commission's need for resources such as a space to work in, a phone, file space and basic supplies. Gerard noted that we should seek an appropriation for basic needs of the Commission as noted by Mike and asked if Mike would consult with Representative Bickford about the possibility of office space. Ron suggested that we spend some of our existing donated money to purchase letterhead and to bring experts to NH to speak at commission meetings so that we are in a better position to request legislative funding in fiscal 2005.

#### Website update:

Mike asked if the publication "The Nurturing man" might be purchased for distribution on our website. At the request of the Commission, Mike will check with publisher on copyright and cost issues relevant to this request.

#### Committee Reports

Suicide: Ron reported that Beth has completed the data set template and delivered the CD to Tom Andrews who is now entering the data. Joe agreed that he would set up a meeting with the Medical Examiners office and the Commission Committee to begin looking at the initial data. This meeting would be held about one week prior to the June meeting of the Commission.

Men's Health: Ron was asked to formally invite Effie Malley and Chuck Rhodes to the July meeting of the Commission.

Association Health Plan Association legislation: After discussion, the Commission agreed that we would prefer not to take a position on this issue.

Family Law Task Force: Mike Geanoulis noted that Peggy Ward, social scientist, spoke about the need for a family justice system that maximized time of BOTH parents with their children. He also noted that John Cameron's positive article on collaborative law and shared parenting.

FLTF will be reporting soon on recommendations regarding shared parenting, parenting plans, reduction of acrimony in divorce and other salient issues. Also, FLTF is looking into what can be done to separate domestic violence from other divorce issues such as property, household and financial issues.

#### Domestic Violence Summit Report

Lee Newman reported that he thought he might be able to obtain a disc with all of the workshops on it. Conference was a good opportunity for networking but he was disappointed in the amount of gender bias at many of the sessions in which he was a participant.

Mike Geanoulis noted that many of the session topics focused on women as victims, rather than men or both genders. Mike noted that men are seen as primary perpetrators at such conferences and that this is what needs to change. Mike provided examples of disturbing sexist workshops. In one case, it was noted that boys who see DV learn from this and are likely to commit DV but there was no mention about girls who witness DV and any likelihood that they too, might grow up to commit DV. Another workshop focused on the physiology of the male brain yet there was not focus on the physiology of the female brain even though both sexes have nearly equal assault rates. One presenter echoed the mythical rule of thumb which never existed – the long debunked myth wrongfully held that it was once OK for a man to beat his wife with a stick as long as it was no bigger than his thumb. Mike did note that one workshop noted the importance of the father as critically important to the lives and upbringing of children but that the presenter seemed willing to let the father be removed on one sided testimony nevertheless.

Geanoulis also noted that Murray Straus, PhD, Domestic Violence specialist who lives and works in New Hampshire, was not invited to the DV summit probably because of his position that female assaults should not be ignored and that men stay in abusive relationships for many of the same reasons women do.

Straus will present to the Men's Commission at its June 30 meeting on the causes and consequences of Domestic Violence.

#### Public Comment:

Lee Newman updated us regarding VIP/SAFE. He made a presentation in Washington DC which was very favorably received. Lee has received news that others in Washington are requesting him to visit more frequently and make additional presentations. Additionally, the NH Attorney General's office has favorably received VIP/SAFE. Lee expressed some urgency about his frustration with the VIP and the Commission noting, "we must not fail... this (our mission and purpose) is too important" and urged the Commission to be decisive about its commitment in this regard. Lee proposed that the Commission co-sponsor the VIP/SAFE conference this fall and the Commission took this request under advisement.

A question was raised about the status of Tony Raymond as a Commissioner. Gerard Boyle answered that Tony has expressed his intent to resign given other pressing priorities, and that he (Tony) would be notify the Governor of his intent.

Dan Frazier expressed concern that his shared parenting request in Strafford County Court was not even considered by the judge. He feels that judges who give custody to the

mother who claims she has an acrimonious relationship with the father too often encourages her to create acrimony as the means by which to secure control over the children. He says present adversarial arenas hurt the children and that there is no equality in the courts.

Jim Duffy of the Monadnock Men's Resource Center, asked if there was any way to codify our work in terms of data. Mike G. referred Jim to the report that was drafted by the legislature that created this Commission. Jim shared additional comments including: CJ system needs a lot more treatment programs for batterers, both male and female; men and women need a lot more education about DV issues; he said-she said positions are not helpful, men are batterers too; crisis workers need more training on DV issues, and that he is concerned about coding in the schools. He suggested that the Commission would be well advised to understand and consider these points. Jim referenced the Kidder decision and G. Boyle assisted in helping us understand the intent and implications of this decision which essentially says that the attorney for the person accused of domestic violence cannot interview the accused without a court order.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.

The next meeting is June 30, 2004 in the LOB, room 208, Concord, NH. The time of the meeting is scheduled from 1:00 – 4:00 pm.