

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF MEN

<http://www.nh.gov/csm>

Minutes for the Twenty-Seventh Commission Meeting

May 29, 2006 1-4 PM

Legislative Office Building Room 206, Concord, NH

These minutes were taken by Scott Garman.

Members Present: Scott Garman, Michael Geanoulis, Stephen Gorin, Marshall Hickok, David Lauren, Gus Lerandeau, Joe Mastromarino.

Also present: Rep. David Bickford, Lee Newman, Philip Ryan.

The Chair opened the meeting with Commissioner introductions.

Treasury Item:

Mike Geanoulis announced that he received a check from the NH chapter of the National Congress for Fathers and Children, to cover half of the Commission's printing costs from our first biennial report. Mike gave the donation, in the amount of \$126.50, to David Lauren to deposit in the Commission's bank account.

Secretary's Report:

Scott Garman distributed copies of the April 2006 minutes. Mike Geanoulis suggested several amendments to them. No objections were raised to these amendments. Mike Geanoulis then moved to approve the full set of proposed amendments to the minutes. Scott Garman seconded, and the motion was approved 6-0, with Gus Lerandeau abstaining.

David Lauren then moved to accept the minutes as amended. Stephen Gorin seconded, and the motion was approved 6-0, with Gus Lerandeau abstaining.

Web Site Update:

Scott Garman reported that no changes to our web site have taken place other than posting our last approved minutes, as well as the transcript of DHHS testimony from Commissioner John Stephen. Scott noted that as agreed upon during the previous meeting, he sent draft copies of the transcript to John Stephen and Grace Mattern, and received no suggested changes from them.

Education Committee Status Report:

Scott Garman reported that he recently discovered that the Portland Press Herald in Maine ran a four-day series of articles (titled "The New Gender Gap") on the crisis of boys in education. The article series began on March 26, and the 15+ articles provide very valuable information about the status of young men in education in Maine. Scott has not yet completed reading all of the articles, but

summarized the topics of a few he has read so far, including:

- * Techniques being used to try to raise boy's reading scores.
- * Single-sex education.
- * Attracting more men to colleges and universities.
- * The impact of gender politics on programs that focus on boy's issues.

Joe Mastromarino asked Scott to post a link to this article series on the CSM web site. Scott agreed to do this and add it to the Resources page of the site under the Education topic.

Joe noted to the group in the large information packet he distributed, that there is information about the Boy's Project (<http://www.boysproject.net>), which is another effort to help improve the educational status of boys.

Scott Garman mentioned that he is working on developing a short document to summarize the status of boys and list recommendations that the Commission can endorse. This document could then be distributed to NH legislators to help keep them informed about the Commission's work and raise awareness about the problems facing boys.

David Lauren suggested that Scott also compile a list of educators and educational experts that could be asked to provide testimony to the Commission on these topics. Marshall Hickok suggested college admissions officers and high school guidance counselors would be good candidates to invite to testify. Scott agreed and will bring in recommendations at the next meeting of at least a couple of third parties to ask for testimony from. David mentioned that he has some contacts in the special education system that he will talk to.

Marshall Hickok noted that a few months ago he had gotten in touch with someone who works for the Pell Grant foundation and that this person may be a valuable resource to talk with further.

RADAR (Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Abuse Reporting):

Mike Geanoulis noted that he is no longer asking the Commission to endorse RADAR, until further efforts to understand the domestic violence issue are undertaken, including hearing testimony from experts. Joe Mastromarino noted that he contacted Dr. Murray Straus' office, but was told that Dr. Straus will be in vacation until the 31st of May.

Legislative Report:

Rep. David Bickford was invited to speak and give a summary of recent events in family law legislation. The legislative session has now ended, so some bills have found closure.

HB312 was passed, which establishes procedures for appointing parenting coordinators in family law cases.

HB529 did not pass out of the House/Senate conference committee, despite tremendous public support and the endorsement of the Commission on the Status of Men. This bill would have established a

presumption of comparable parenting time for both parents.

Two child support bills did not pass. One would have allowed an obligor to deduct the cost of health insurance premiums from income used to calculate child support. A second bill would have done the same for college loan expenses.

HB1580, which would have applied child support calculations to both parents on a per-diem basis, according to parenting time, failed in the Senate.

David noted that the Commission on the Status of Men sunsets on September 1, 2007, and that any legislation to extend the CSM would need to be filed this fall.

David Lauren motioned to officially thank Rep. David Bickford for keeping the Commission informed about legislation related to our mission, and being responsive to the Commission's questions and needs. Stephen Gorin seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report:

David Lauren reported that he met with Barry Bodell to merge funds from our two accounts into the one that can be used for expense reimbursement purposes. He will be depositing the check from NCFC-NH into our account soon.

The CSM's Mission, Chair's Comments:

Joe Mastromarino referred to the thick handout he distributed at the start of the meeting and spoke at length regarding the mission of the CSM and his thoughts on a root cause of the problem. Joe believes that a common sentiment exists in all men that is created by cultural biases against men, and that sentiment is that boys and men are somehow inherently flawed or inadequate. He believes that this common thread is applied in most discussions about gender, including whether boys deserve greater attention in education, whether male victims of domestic violence deserve help and services, and the lack of compassion for the higher death rates of men in their professions.

Joe believes that a general sense of inadequacy exists in most men that is the result of (what amounts to) common (if unrecognized) cultural biases against men, and that these real disparities in societal treatment result in a belief by boys and young men that they are inherently flawed or defective when compared to women. He believes that this common psychological defect is relevant to most male suboptimal behavior and underachievement. Thus men feel guilty in almost every instance where they should, by right, demand parity. Many men, when faced with the popularized vision of the nearly all-powerful primal woman, retreat into an apologetic existence and gender-based self-loathing. The biases affect almost every aspect of life, from educational intolerance of normal behaviors to an overt lack of programs for boys, a huge disparity in health initiatives, unequal recognition as being a victim of domestic violence coupled with a more severe and intolerant assumption of guilt as perpetrators of domestic violence, the unequal number of hours that men are expected to spend in the workplace all the way to civil judgments and programs in prisons. Many men are in a situation where they are the victims of a general and sometimes official disinterest in their poorer outcomes, in their lives of desperate poverty as a result of divorce actions and in their higher death rates.

David Lauren thanked Joe for his comments and noted the broad nature of the issues that are impacting men. He feels that the Commission therefore needs to focus more on some of these issues so that we can address all of the duties we have in our statute.

Stephen Gorin brought up the fact that particularly in the area of domestic violence issues, the research has become so politicized that he is reluctant to take any of it at face value, and has even read critiques of Dr. Murray Straus' methods. David Lauren added to that that he has specifically found articles on the internet critiquing the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), and echoed Stephen's concerns about the political nature of domestic violence research. David feels that while he appreciates the efforts of SAFE-NH, that he would prefer hearing input from Lee Newman in the context of other domestic violence experts at the same time.

Marshall Hickok stated that he believes the Commission's work in the domestic violence area could be to quantify the amount of under-reporting of domestic assaults on males or examining laws which are demonstrably biased. But barring that, the continual discussions on domestic violence issues have not been productive and take up a disproportionate amount of time because they are unfocused. He recommended setting specific goals and objectives so that we could try to solve problems rather than simply contemplating the issue over and over again. Marshall also suggested that we could invite former CSM Chair and now judge Gerry Boyle to a meeting to get ideas on specific things that could be done to educate police and others.

Michael Geanoulis echoed this suggestion but believes that more time needs to be spent on domestic violence because the issue is complex and unfairly reduces a father's status with his children. He recommended that we re-invite Dr. Murray Straus to the Commission, as well as members of the NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Marshall added the suggestion of police Chief Russell.

Rep. David Bickford also reminded the Commissioners that men's health issues were an important issue, one critical to getting the legislation passed which formed the Commission.

The Boys Project:

Joe Mastromarino referred to the handout he distributed which included information about The Boys Project (<http://www.boysproject.net>). This project and web site includes eye-opening information about the status of boys, particularly in education and regarding psychological health. See their statistics section.

AOC Report on Restraining Orders:

Mike Geanoulis wanted to clarify a point that was made during the last meeting regarding the high percentage of restraining orders that are issued. He distributed an AOC report with data from late 1998 showing the numbers of restraining orders granted (both temporary and final) from several cities in NH. Mike noted that in Littleton and Salem, the percent of temporary restraining orders granted were 100% and 98%, respectively. Mike feels that these statistics show that there are courts in this state that have issued restraining orders routinely. This data was the most recent Mike was able to obtain.

David Lauren noted that the data Mike distributed also included the percentages of restraining orders that became final, and that those numbers were much lower. He stated that he feels that when judges issue temporary restraining orders, that it is important to err on the side of caution, and that temporary orders have safeguards built into them to guarantee that the defendant is able to be heard within a short window of time (10 days).

Joe Mastromarino responded by suggesting that the low percent of final orders issued could be the result of most of the temporary restraining order requests being unfounded and unnecessary. Joe also mentioned that he has read articles suggesting that a person has a greater risk of being attacked immediately after a restraining order is filed, and this increased risk is due to the issuing of the restraining order.

Domestic Violence Conference:

Lee Newman announced that on June 8 and 9, there will be an annual domestic violence conference held at Waterville Valley. Lee encouraged members of the Commission to attend this event so that they can see first hand how biased the trainings and events are which are promoted by mainstream domestic violence groups in the state. David Lauren noted that he is registered for this conference and would be happy to report back to the Commission about his experience there.

Miscellaneous:

Marshall Hickok stated that he will put together some proposals regarding getting the Commission better publicity, issuing press releases, etc. and will report on his progress on this next month.

Michael Geanoulis announced that a new book by Richard Doyle has been published titled Save the Males.

Public Testimony:

The Commission heard brief comments from a member of the public, who is a divorced father.