

NH Commission on the Status of Men

Public Meeting: June 30, 2004

1:00 – 4:00 Legislative Office Building/Concord

Minutes taken by Ron Blankenstein, Secretary

Commission Members Present: Gerard Boyle, Joseph Mastromarino, Ron Blankenstein, Larry Colby, and Steve Gorin.

New Hampshire Public Television was present to record the proceedings.

Chairman Boyle welcomed those present for this month's commission meeting. Minutes for the April meeting were approved prior to this meeting and have already been posted on the commission website. Gerard noted the receipt of letters from Warren Peterson regarding gender discrimination by the NH Department of Corrections, and from Lee Newman regarding a request for the commission to co-sponsor (with VIP/SAFE-NH) the upcoming fall conference.

Commissioner Mastromarino noted that Dr. Andrews, Medical Examiners Office, has been away and therefore the sub-committee of the commission did not meet with him prior to this meeting. Joe expects that the sub-committee will meet with Tom to review suicide data, entered on our approved template, around the third week in July.

Commissioner Blankenstein reported that Effie Malley and Chuck Rhodes have been formally invited to attend the next commission meeting to speak on Men's Health Issues.

Chairman Boyle introduced Dr. Murray A. Straus, Professor of the Family Research Laboratory at UNH.

Dr. Straus discussed three major questions regarding partner violence.

* How Prevalent is Partner Violence?

* Why Does it Occur?

* How Can We Prevent It?

Dr. Straus distributed handouts and discussed his research that attempts to answer the three major questions he raises. Dr. Straus' research suggests that Partner Violence is extremely prevalent; both in violence perpetrated by men against women and in violence perpetrated by women against men. Dr. Straus discussed reasons why people believe that partner violence is primarily a male crime. These reasons include recorded police data, sympathy for the injured party, efforts of the feminist movement to bring violence to public attention, cultural norms, media distortion and suppression of evidence by researchers.

Some of the causes of Family Violence include high levels of conflict in families, dominance of one partner, cultural norms tolerating family violence, family training in violence, violence in society, psychological problems, and interwoven multiple causes. The causes equally apply to men and to women.

How can we prevent Partner Violence? Dr. Straus believes strongly that Primary Prevention is the most helpful answer. It provides a means for lowering violence by counteracting harmful circumstances before they have had a chance to produce violence. Primary prevention does not seek to prevent a specific person from committing a violent act. Instead, primary prevention seeks to reduce the risk for a whole population. The outcome is that, although some individuals may continue to be violent, their number will be reduced.

A question and answer period followed Dr. Straus' remarks. Specifically, Dr. Straus was asked why he was not in attendance at the Domestic and Sexual Violence Summit held recently in the Mt. Washington Valley. Dr. Straus replied that he was not invited, which may speak volumes by itself. Furthermore, Dr. Strauss feels that the conference is targeted for practitioners, not researchers. Finally, Dr. Straus feels that he has been blacklisted for publishing studies as illustrated at this commission meeting which shows women to be equally assaultive. Dr. Straus concluded his remarks by noting that the suppression of evidence based on the research of Dr. Straus and his colleagues is a threat to

women ... not the reverse (ie: that violence by women needs to be treated if only as a matter of safety for them).

It was agreed that the NH Commission on the Status of Men would lobby the Attorney General's Office to secure an invitation for Dr. Straus to present his research findings at the next Family Violence Conference. It was also agreed that the May 2002 report of the Governor's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence contains multiple biased references to violence rates of men while excluding violence rates of women and that that type of bias must be made known to the Attorney Generals Office.

Chairman Boyle asked Dr. Straus for concluding comments or suggestions for this Commission to improve the lives of the citizens of NH. Dr. Straus noted that the strategy women have followed - pointing out millions of female victims of violence by men - worked and might work for men as well. The problem of course, is that 'real men don't claim this need for protection'. The real problem is about our children who are growing up in DV households. The welfare of our citizens and our future citizens is at stake here.

Mr. Geanoulis feels that too many children are rendered fatherless because of sexist DV policies and biased education. Mr. Geanoulis also said if it would be better to treat DV on a sex neutral basis, family systems approach.

Mr. Geanoulis will pursue directions on obtaining NH Public Television's tape for possible future reference.

Treasurer's Report: Commissioner Colby noted that he met with Barry Bodell of the Administrative Services Office and discussed our budget and process for travel reimbursement. Larry distributed information about the commission treasury and it was agreed that the recent donation of \$50 should be placed in line 090. It was also felt that general funds should pay for commission travel reimbursement and should not come from our budget. Larry agreed to discuss this again with Mr. Bodell. Larry mentioned that we should request that any new dollars raised should be non-lapsing dollars. Finally, Larry walked us through the travel reimbursement process and reminded us that we must submit our FY04 request not later than July 20, 2004. At that time we must show proof of insurance by attaching the cover page of our auto policy with our reimbursement forms.

Public Comment:

Maurice Chaput spoke to the Commission about his unsuccessful day in court. Chairman Boyle suggested strongly that Mr. Chaput be represented by counsel and petitioning the court – for contempt or for clarification would be an appropriate next step.

Steve Laliberty made several suggestions to the Commission including more parenting classes being offered, clarification about what constitutes domestic violence, what constitutes harassment, the need for more visitation centers, and the need for unbiased Guardian Ad Litem.

Jim Duffy thanked the Commission for inviting Dr. Straus and emphasized the need for prevention, that real men are taught not to speak the language of their emotions (and that men need to support changing this attitude), that men need to acknowledge the importance of slide 32 (Dr. Straus) that speaks to the great psychological, emotional and physical harm from domestic violence which may help alleviate the bone of contention in equal protection.

Other Business:

Chairman Boyle will speak to Tony Raymond about his official resignation from the Commission so that the position may be filled soon. The Commission acknowledges and supports the interests of Scott Garman and Dr. Milton Burnett in serving on this Commission.

Chairman Boyle acknowledged a letter received from Paul Clements regarding the inequitable celebratory Mother's and Father's Day programs in our NH prisons.

Chairman Boyle informed the Commission that he was appointed by Chief Justice Broderick to serve on the Task Force for Electronic Media and Openness in the Courts.

The question of the Commission's sponsorship of the VIP/SAFE-NH DV conference was discussed at length. Commissioner Geanoulis will discuss this further with Lee Newman and the vote was deferred until next meeting.

To further dialogue on domestic violence and other issues of concern to men and women, the commissioners invite representatives from the Women's Commission and the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to attend meetings of the Commission on the Status of Men.

The meeting was concluded at 4:23 pm.

The next meeting will be held on July 28, 2004 from 1-4 pm in room 208 of the LOB in Concord, NH.