

NH Commission on the Status of Men

Public Meeting: July 28, 2004

1:00 – 4:00 Upham Walker House, Park Street, Concord

Minutes taken by Ron Blankenstein, Secretary

Commission Members Present: Gerard Boyle, Ron Blankenstein, Larry Colby, and Steve Gorin, and Michael Geanoulis. Joseph Mastromarino was unable to attend.

Chairman Boyle welcomed those present for the tenth commission meeting. Minutes for the June meeting were approved prior to this meeting and, with one correction, will be posted to the commission website.

Gerard noted the receipt of letters and a \$50 donation to the Commission. The letter will be brought to the next meeting for circulation.

Website Update: No major changes to the website since the last meeting.

Committee Reports: The meeting of the Suicide Study sub-group will be rescheduled to a date in August.

Representative David Bickford spoke to the Commission about a number of major items. Rep. Bickford attended the Massachusetts Medical Society Conference on Men's Health on June 13th. Over 50 doctors were informed about the establishment of the NH Commission on the Status of Men and the work that is being done. Dr. Edward Stephens of the "One Step Institute for Mental Health Research, Inc." presented a \$1,000 donation to the Commission on behalf of the Institute. Treasurer Colby will send a letter to thanks and acknowledgement to the Dr. Stephens.

Rep. Bickford also noted that the Commission should seek filing space for information collection, data storage and information retrieval. He suggested that we seek three file

cabinets that reflect the 3 major goals of the Commission. To this end, Rep. Bickford distributed copies of a number of important articles that he recommended for filing in Commission files.

Rep. Bickford mentioned the DOE, Bureau of Equity and asked if the Commission should explore where this bureau stands and what kind of information they might be disseminating. He also mentioned the Reference book, "The Legal Handbook for Women" and the idea of creating one for men. Councilor Ray Burton has expressed interest in helping the Commission find ways to fund such a similar book for men.

Larry Colby mentioned a follow-up discussion with Barry Bodell where he learned that mileage is only reimbursable out of funds raised by the Commission. It was the unanimous opinion of the Commission that we are eligible for general fund reimbursement under the provisions of the RSA establishing the Commission. Larry will raise the question again and refer to the wording of the legislation.

Men's Health Network – Gerard Boyle reported that he and members of the Men's Health Network met with Senator Gregg and his staff in Washington, DC. This meeting concerned a piece of pending legislation that seeks to have an Office of Men's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services just as there is an Office of Women's Health. In fact, each agency of the government has an Office of Women's Health, but as near as can be determined, there are no offices for men's health in any agency. This bill would create such an office and Secretary Tommy Thompson may decide to create the office without going through the Senate. Senator Gregg is Chair of the Committee on Health and Human Services and will discuss this idea with the Commissioner. The Office of Women's Health is supportive of this idea. The Office of Minority Health is also supportive. In addition to a briefing with Senator Gregg, Gerard Boyle also presented information to Senator Sununu's staff.

The Men's Health Network will be producing pamphlets on prostate cancer that include the logo of the Network as well as the NH Commission on the Status of Men. This is being done at no cost to the Commission. The Network wants to be a resource for this Commission. It was noted that Governor Benson signed a proclamation regarding Men's Health and that this proclamation will be added to the Commission website.

Commissioner Boyle noted that at the Governor's Rockingham County Open House, Gov. Benson expressed concerns about fathers' issues and invited a group to speak with him last Friday in the Governor's office. The Governor and Commissioner of Health and Human Services, John Stephen, attended this meeting and heard from men and women concerned about the treatment of men by NH courts, about child support payment issues, about the

negative influences of federal policy on father involvement, and about a shared parenting focus that is being recommended by Massachusetts. Commissioner Stephen was given a copy of the father facts booklet published by the National Fatherhood Initiative. A copy of the Shared Parenting booklet was given to the Governor.

Family Law Task Force: Mike Geanoulis reported that Attorney Honey Hastings issued the second draft of the Task Force report. Positive elements in this report include a joint parenting plan, a child impact plan, a statement about the 'best interests of the child' and defining the term "best interest", alternative dispute resolution, encouraging education, courts urged to consider parenting coordinators. On the negative side, a few on the panel are resisting the goal of recommending 50/50 parenting as being the theoretical best way to minimize the winner/loser dichotomy and the acrimony that accompanies such contests before the bar. Geanoulis fears that if the panel does not strive for the highest possible level of equality between mothers and fathers that the high rate of fatherlessness will continue unabated.

There was some discussion at the Family law Task Force about Amanda Brady's claim that shared parenting was not working in California and this statement made the minutes without documentation. After being asked for documentation, she amended her statement to say it was Wisconsin, not California. She was, again, asked for supporting documentation for her failure of shared parenting in Wisconsin. The documentation of this will be discussed at the next meeting.

A question was raised about the definition of the 'silver bullet'. Chairman Boyle explained, through example, the allegation of DV as a way for women to gain custody of the child and to expedite men's removal from the family home using one-sided testimony.

Tony Raymond has sent his letter of resignation to the Governor. We are awaiting the Governor's decision on a replacement to the Commission.

VIP-SAFE:

Lee Neuman reported that DOVE only takes referrals from Coalition Women's Crisis Centers. NH Legal Assistance will take VIP-SAFE referrals if they meet income guidelines. The NH State Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence holds the purse strings for DV funding in NH. Who authorizes the Coalition to take in and disburse federal funds for DV? Lee and Gerard will speak to the Governor about this situation.

Lee also reported that VIP-SAFE lost their office this month due to lack of funding. Despite this problem, services to continue to be performed without interruption. VIP/SAFE has operated for 21 months and has served almost 800 people to date, mostly men.

On the national scene, SAFE is looking into changing the language that appears in DHHS that suggests that DV is the leading cause of death among women. This is an incorrect statement.

Lee reported that they have received 9334 website hits to date, 218 of these are hits to the Commission. Also, Lee is seeking a scholarship from HUD on grantwriting. HUD is interested in the work VIP-SAFE is doing in NH. When conducting a GOOGLE search; Ask A Question, VIP-SAFE is listed as the #1 rated place that deals with violence prevention in NH.

Lee noted his continuing interest in having the Commission co-sponsor a National Conference this spring. SAFE wants to support the idea of a national conference by sending speakers. The Men's Health Network will also be invited to participate.

Public Comment: Eric Grenier and his mother, Michelin Schevis presented comment on his treatment by the courts. The accounts were so significant that Chairman Boyle strongly suggested that Eric make a formal complaint to the Judicial Conduct Committee and the Judicial Conduct Commission.

Other Business: Mike Geanoulis recalled that NHPTV taped the Dr. Straus presentation and wondered if the Commission might obtain a copy for its records. Ron Blankenstein said that he would call NHPTV and inquire. Scott Garman taped the presentation as well and has a request into Dr. Straus for permission to replicate and share with the Commission. Lee Newman mentioned that the tape "Also At Risk" will be made available to the Commission.

The next Commission meeting will be held on August 25th from 1:00 - 4:00 pm at the LOB, Room 208, Concord, NH.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.