

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF MEN

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Minutes for the Twenty-Ninth Commission Meeting

July 28, 2006 1-4 PM

Legislative Office Building Room 206, Concord, NH

These minutes were taken by Scott Garman.

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

Members Absent: Gus Lerandau.

Secretary's Report:

Scott Garman distributed draft copies of the June minutes to the Commissioners. Michael Geanoulis also distributed copies of a minutes amendment proposal. The amendment would delete a paragraph relating to commentary on NH domestic violence homicide data during Dr. Murray Straus' testimony, and replace it with more accurate information from the NH Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee report. At the time of the discussion, incorrect data was being discussed. David Lauren moved to accept the amendment, and Mike Geanoulis seconded. During discussion, Marshall Hickok noted that the minutes accurately reflected what was discussed at the meeting, and that an addendum/asterisk clarifying the new data should be included instead. David agreed with this and withdrew his motion.

David then moved to amend the June minutes with corrected data using an addendum/asterisk to clarify the correct data from the NH Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee report. Mike Geanoulis seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. Elaine Holden, The Reading Foundation:

David Lauren introduced Dr. Elaine Holden to the Commission. Dr. Holden is an education specialist with over 30 years of experience. She is a Senior Lecturer at the Rivier College Graduate School of Education, and for ten years has co-owned The Reading Foundation, based in Amherst, NH. The Reading Foundation is a private educational program which specializes in working with students who have learning disabilities, particularly reading disabilities and dyslexia.

The following is a summary of highlights from Dr. Holden's testimony.

Boys make up 3/4 of all students in special education programs nation-wide.

Research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has found that about 80% of U.S. students with learning disabilities specifically have reading disabilities as their primary or only disability.

About 11% of NH school-age children experience chronic ear infections during the time they are learning the basics of language. This simple health issue can block or distort the sounds of language and then hinder later efforts to learn how to read.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in elementary schools are women. This puts boys at a disadvantage because it is easier for girls to relate to female teachers, and boys sometimes come to view learning about reading as a female-oriented activity. Due to these kinds of biases, Dr. Holden also believes that teachers are more likely to refer male students to special education than girls. Girls are likely under-diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Dr. Holden has read few studies on the topic of fatherlessness, but from what she has read she did confirm that the role of the father is one of the most critical factors in the healthy development of girls.

A major factor why there are so few male educators in early childhood education is because salaries are so low. And while there are some excellent male teachers, there are also a lot of male teachers who choose teaching because they cannot find employment elsewhere.

Even though women are now well integrated into the workforce, men by and large still feel cultural pressure to earn money and serve as primary breadwinners for their families. The best and brightest men thus see the private sector, not teaching, as the area to work in to deal with this pressure.

Dr. Holden discussed an anecdote about a man who went into teaching late in his life after he felt he had been a successful breadwinner for his family. He went into teaching because he felt he could finally "afford to do it."

Recommendation: The Department of Education has clear definitions of reading. Educators need to be trained to focus on these definitions and be trained in reading techniques that are shown to be effective in the 20-30% of all students who have learning disabilities. Dr. Louisa Moats developed a reading knowledge test for teachers that is very strong.

The Reading Recovery Program has not been shown as effective by any longitudinal research, and Dr. Holden is skeptical of its effectiveness.

Recommendation: There needs to be a stronger recruitment effort to get men into early childhood education and general reading education. Raising teacher salaries is one way of helping to do this.

There also needs to be a corresponding increase in cultural support of viewing men as nurturers, even in the home.

Dr. Holden offered her time for any future questions or for information on reading and dyslexia.

Justice Gerard Boyle:

Justice Boyle serves as a judge at Concord District Court, which handles criminal cases as well as civil cases involving small claims, domestic violence and stalking petitions, and juvenile cases including delinquency, abuse and neglect, and CHINS petitions. Concord District Court is the third busiest trial court in New Hampshire, handling about 12,000 criminal cases per year.

Justice Boyle has attended many training programs by the Department of Justice and has also attended the last two domestic violence conferences in NH sponsored by the Attorney General's office.

As of July 28, 2006, 138 domestic violence cases have been heard at the Concord District Court for this year. This does not include stalking orders. A new computer system is being installed state-wide which made it difficult to determine the number of stalking cases so far this year.

Justice Boyle suggested that the Commission consider developing or facilitating a mentoring program to mentor young men going through the juvenile justice system. Justice Boyle has asked every juvenile that he's dealt with what activities are done outside of going to school, and the answer is almost universally "nothing." He believes that getting these youths involved in other activities is crucial, and that a mentorship program would help them a great deal. Nearly all of these youths lack a male figure in the household.

Justice Boyle recommended that Commissioners contact Jimmy Boyd of the Men's Health Network in Washington, DC, for ideas for the Commission to take on in terms of men's health (including speakers and sponsoring events, such as Men's Health Day) and support when it comes time to renewing the Commission.

Back in June of 2005, Justice Boyle, with the support of Jimmy Boyd and several others, met with the Deputy Domestic Policy advisor to the President to discuss changes to the Violence Against Women Act to allow for funding of services which aid male victims of domestic abuse. Some of those changes were in fact made to the bill before it was passed.

Justice Boyle is concerned about the lack of services for male victims of domestic violence in NH. He feels that SAFE-NH has proven it serves a real need and believes SAFE-NH should receive domestic violence funding to support and extend its efforts.

Justice Boyle reported frequently seeing charging documents in criminal cases incorrectly marked as "domestic violence related." This happens most commonly when one charging document among several is validly domestic violence related, but all of the cases end up with the marking. This could be skewing statistics that are being gathered based on this marking. This error also has more serious consequences, because when a person is convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor, any firearms owned by the convicted individual must be taken, and the convicted is forbidden from owning any firearms for as long as the protective order is in effect. These orders can in theory be renewed perpetually. This can end the careers of people who are police officers or in the military.

Justice Boyle requires that in all of his domestic violence trials that everything be on the record, and dealt with in the courtroom with recording equipment operating. Some judges will review restraining order petitions in chambers, but Justice Boyle does not agree with this practice.

Justice Boyle has not seen in his courtroom situations where domestic violence restraining orders are used as a prelude to a divorce. However, he did see this regularly when he practiced law as an attorney. During that time, he knew attorneys who felt that if the facts supported it, that it would be malpractice not to counsel their client to get a restraining order.

Justice Boyle noted that a large majority of domestic violence restraining order defendants in his courtroom are pro-se (without an attorney).

Mike Geanoulis asked Justice Boyle what percentage of requested restraining orders he has granted. Justice Boyle responded that he did not know off-hand, but that he believed it was a high percentage. He also noted that a high percentage of defendants exercise their right to a hearing within five days.

Marshall Hickok noted that one of the troublesome problems with restraining orders is that, in practice, there are no negative consequences to making a false allegation in order to obtain a restraining order. Mike Geanoulis suggested it might be possible possible to get relief from abuse of the process by having the petitioner retreat to a safe place temporarily, so as to give the defendant a chance to respond before issuing a restraining order.