



CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES  
ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
**TOGETHER**

Circle, Washington County's Domestic and Sexual Violence agency supports H.27 as written. We believe addressing coercive control is essential for survivor safety. Survivors we work with every day desperately need these protections. Our hotline rings on average 12 times a day, with about 50% of those calls related to seeking legal protection. Our staff and volunteers explain that the current statute requires physical violence or a threat of physical violence in order to secure an RFA. Callers often list the myriad of ways that their abusive partner is being controlling - which they know will lead to violence - but maybe hasn't yet. We then need to respond to "so I guess I have to wait to get hit". Amending the statute would create a path to not only reduce violence but to prevent physical violence from occurring in the first place.

We recently worked with a woman whose partner has a history of violence with previous partners and with law enforcement. He has made veiled threats that she understands could equal violence, but he knows not to be specific. He has isolated her from her family and repeatedly humiliates her in front of her older child. She is extremely fearful of him so complies with his wishes. She filed for an RFA under the current statute which was denied as he has not been explicitly violent with her.

While I understand that there has been concern expressed regarding abusive partners using this tool against victims, we believe that those concerns are largely unfounded. Most abusive people don't want to alert authorities to their behavior and so they don't routinely access the court system first and preemptively file for RFAs. If they are going to file in court, the much more typical pattern of behavior is for them to attempt to counter claim once an RFA has already been filed. Counter-filing of RFA's does happen and often are seen by judges for what they are: another way to abuse a victim. This is the reason that we are also in support of H.45 Abusive Litigation. The fear of abusive people using the legal system to enact further harm should not stop us from continually trying to make victims safer.

Circle and the other member organizations are active in RFA court processes in every county on an ongoing basis. Our staff assist with filing orders and our Legal Advocates attend court weekly to support victims. Legal Advocates meet as a group statewide monthly to discuss all aspects of the RFA process so have intimate knowledge of how RFAs are being utilized across the state and will be able to quickly assess how this statute is working and be able to alert the Network to any potential concerns with implementation.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Karol Diamond  
Co-Director, Circle

Diane Kinney  
Co-Director, Circle



