



TO: Rep. Maxine Grad, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Kienan Christianson, Justice for Victims Legal Clinic, Staff Attorney
DATE: April 10, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Kienan Christianson, and I work at the Justice for Victims Legal Clinic at the Vermont Network which provides holistic legal representation to survivors of domestic and sexual violence statewide.

Today is the Vermont Network's Legislative Day so I am here to share with you some information about the services we provide at our Legal Clinic and more specifically about my role as a Staff Attorney.

First, thank you for your support of domestic and sexual violence victims. I appreciate your willingness to address the known lethality when firearms are present in domestic violence situations. H.422 had a long and challenging journey but you have made a difference for countless victims.

Thank you also for creating potentially more access to after-hours relief from abuse orders by passing H.836 allowing for electronic filing.

At the Justice for Victims Legal Clinic, our goal is to provide comprehensive, holistic legal services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. We approach our services with an eye towards the ways in which trauma impacts and hinders our clients. For us, it's not just about winning cases on behalf of our clients, but also working with our clients towards healing. In each of our intakes, one of the first questions we ask our clients is: "What does healing look like for you?" Sometimes, the best result for our client does not involve the legal system. This is what we mean by providing comprehensive, holistic legal services. A relief from abuse order will protect our client from future harm, but it does not address how to navigate, for example, PTSD flare-ups in the work place. A final divorce decree will provide a framework for our client going forward, but it does not address how to effectively co-parent with another person who has physically, emotionally or sexually assaulted you. By tapping into our member organizations and maintaining partnerships with a variety of social services organizations with in the state, we are able to ensure that all of our clients' needs are met—not just their legal issues.

As evidence of our efficacy, over the last two years we served 378 clients. Of those clients, 202 involved intimate partner violence, 80 involved non-intimate partner violence, 85 involved dating / domestic violence, and 11 involved stalking. We are one of only a few legal clinics in the State of Vermont that provides direct in-court representation to survivors for domestic and sexual violence. As far as I am aware, I am the only attorney in the state who provides representation to survivors of sexual violence in both civil and criminal cases.

In my role as a Staff Attorney, no one day is ever the same. A typical week for me involves meeting potential new clients and assessing their needs (legal and otherwise); prepping my client for a hearing; attending and conducting various court hearings (relief from abuse or other family cases); conducting factual research on behalf of my client; interviewing and preparing witnesses for various hearings;



engaging in motion practice on behalf of my client; preparing and conducting training and outreach with one of our member organizations; and finally, uplifting and encouraging my clients as they move towards achieving actual healing from the trauma they have endured. It is an honor and a privilege to represent so many talented, loving survivors. While each of my clients have endured some of the worst pain imaginable, I am awestruck and humbled by their tenacious ability to move past their trauma and build purpose-driven lives.

I am happy to discuss in more detail any questions the Committee Members may have. Thank you very much for having me.