



Senate Judiciary Committee

H.512: An act relating to miscellaneous court and Judiciary related amendments

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Thank you for taking testimony on H. 512 Draft 1.3 Section 18a. The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence in our state. The Vermont Network represents 15 Member Organizations throughout the state which provide advocacy and support to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Together, these organizations served 8,550 individuals last year in Vermont.

While on the surface, it may appear to you that these alimony discussions are not necessarily an issue that impact survivors of domestic or sexual violence, we would like to highlight several concerns we have regarding the current language and its impact on survivors – especially those who experience financial abuse.

As currently written, the language in Sec. 18a. 15 V.S.A. § 752 has the potential to create an unfair disadvantage for the payor. The Vermont Network's position is not solely about the gender of the individual payor or payee. We recognize that people of all genders can be either the payor or payee. However, the current language has the potential to unfairly disadvantage people who have been victims of financial control or abuse by their partners during a marriage. Financial abuse is behavior that seeks to control a person's ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources, and threatens their self-sufficiency and financial autonomy.¹ Though financial abuse occurs in 99% of domestic violence cases, a 2014 study showed that 78% of Americans did not recognize financial abuse as a form of domestic violence.² Financial abuse has long-term impacts on financial security due to limited educational and career opportunities, frequent changes of employment or experiences of unemployment and overall impact on earning potential. Often people who experience financial abuse have limited resources of their own and their partner may have damaged their credit as a means of control. With these considerations in mind, we support the proposed language recommendations presented to the committee by the Vermont Commission on Women.

Thank you so much for your time today. I know that this committee cares deeply about protecting survivors and victims of domestic abuse and I am grateful for the chance to speak with you on their behalf regarding the proposed changes to H.512.

¹ Adams, A.E., Beeble, M.L. (2018). "Intimate Partner Violence and Psychological Well-Being: Examining the effect of economic abuse on women's quality of life." *Psychology of Violence*.

² Adams, Adrienne E. "Measuring the Effects of Domestic Violence on Women's Financial Well-being." CFS Research Brief 2011-5.6