

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PREVENTION AND SERVICES

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-SIXTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

HEARINGS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C., ON JULY 10, 11, 1979

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Statement Submitted to the
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

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POSITION STATEMENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL, HR. 2977

Submitted by:
The Family Service Association of America
and
The National Conference of Catholic Charities

July 27, 1979

On July 11, 1979 oral testimony was given before the Subcommittee on Select Education for the Coalition of Family Organizations by the American Home Economics Association. The Family Service Association of America as a member of the Coalition supported the statement given at that time. This written statement is intended to further specify our position and is jointly submitted with the National Conference of Catholic Charities.

The National Conference of Catholic Charities and the Family Service Association of America want to express their thanks to the House Subcommittee on Select Education of the House Education and Labor Committee for once again holding hearings on the very important issue of domestic violence. Because this social problem has long been buried by custom and the unwillingness of society to admit its existence, it is especially important that the Congress bring enlightened leadership to this matter. Testimony given before this Subcommittee last year called attention to alarming statistics and helped establish the credibility of this issue as being of major importance and epidemic in nature. We hope the Committee will expand its area of inquiry this year to include an analysis of how federal assistance would best be utilized.

For most of this century the Family Service Association has been the major service organization in this country having as its single focus and priority, American families. The National Conference of Catholic Charities in its sixty-nine year history of reflecting the social concerns of the church has always had a major commitment to strengthening families. Our structures are composed of hundreds of member agencies, thousands of practitioners and many, many thousands of volunteers. Our agencies provide a

variety of services to families spanning the areas of counseling, advocacy and family life education. It is in all of these areas of professional and lay activities that our agencies have encountered the growing problem of domestic violence. The Family Service Association's membership has indicated, for example, through a study called the "Family Listening Post" a growing number of incidences of domestic violence in their communities. The experience of the membership of the National Conference of Catholic Charities reaffirms the seriousness of this problem. As national organizations, therefore, we share a strong commitment and priority concern to address this problem at the level of federal policy. We have, therefore, followed the legislative and bureaucratic developments of the 95th and 96th Congress with interest and concern.

While our national organizations do not believe that the American family as an entity is becoming obsolete or is about to disappear, we do acknowledge that some very serious problems are confronting families and that violence is one of the most critical.

When we look at the problem of violence in families and the fact that shelters are realistically a ~~temporary~~ but essential respite for a woman and her children, we are confronted by the realities of where the federal categorical system, whatever its good points, has taken us. If we want to assist a family in the majority of cases where a woman has chosen to return to the family, then there is no program and no funding to help the family. Title XX, if one looks at the Planning Notes published by HEW, shows little emphasis on families. Indeed, the very goal structure of Title XX fails to focus on families as the integrating structures which our human services system should strengthen. The experiences of our member agencies do not indicate that Title XX has overcome this problem.

A service provider--especially one concerned with families--must relate to each individual program through various regulations, structures and state offices. When enacted, Title XX was intended to fund, at the state level, new approaches to human services in a non-categorical manner. In reality, it has tended to subsidize well established, federal categorical programs in the old patterns. Competition for such funding is very keen and the winners are the non-family-focused categorical programs. It would be quite difficult, for example, for providers of emergency shelter programs to gain access to Title XX dollars in most states.

And where are families? And how do we address issues such as domestic violence? If there were the kind of generic office in HEW that related directly to assisting communities to help families, then the issue of domestic violence would have been naturally encompassed in that structure. But instead, we find a hastily created Office on Domestic Violence (instead of an Office on Families) which ignores the real problem: the lack of an explicit family focus inside HEW and inside government generally. (It might be said that the urgency and dominance of domestic violence on the national scene is symptomatic of the general neglect and lack of focus on families--and reflective of the fact that there is now no federal resource to which service providers can turn for assistance in helping families involved in the cycle of violence.)

Under this Administration, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families was established. This Administration has failed to encourage leadership or research centrally focused on families within ACYF. We believe that it should be clearly understood that we do not see this Office on Domestic Violence as the answer--or even a realistic beginning--to the need for federal policy makers to become concerned about what is happening to American families. We support HR 2977 and do not object to the creation of a new office to deal with this problem, as long as it is

properly staffed by qualified professionals with training and experience in the field of human services. We do so because there is a clear and present need for a program to provide crisis intervention on behalf of abused women and their children. But we believe such a program should be housed in a generic Office on Families within ACTF. What is needed is an appropriate federal response to the larger needs of families in this society. We support this legislation, and this new office as described in the legislation, in that context.

Under this legislation the emphasis should be not only an emergency shelter but also on what kinds of preventive help we can provide for the majority of abused women--those who still reside with their families or who return to them from their emergency shelters. And we believe that shelters funded under this legislation should be required to offer the option of family counseling to victims living in the shelter and that family counseling and therapy continue to be made available after the woman has returned to her family. In other words, if this program is to have any real impact on the cycle of violence in families, then it must address the need for services to these families. To rehabilitate a family, the commitment to services should be available to victims of domestic violence whether they are in a shelter or not. But we are then confronted with the problem again inherent in this legislation: the Office on Domestic Violence as now described in this legislation only addresses the issue of the shelter and limited services provided through the shelter. Unless it is structured and staffed to really address the totality of the problem of violence in families, we are back to the old problem that has plagued us for so long: How do we help families in this country when there are so few resources to assist us? How do we administer a program to reach them? And when will the Congress provide the leadership to make this happen?

The White House Conference on Families which is scheduled for the Spring of 1981 comes at a time when there is much speculation about American families and their relative weaknesses and strengths. It is the responsibility of national organizations to engage in the process of looking at the way in which the federal government responds to the needs and problems of families and to call this to the attention of the Congress. It is our hope that we can help this Subcommittee in the weeks ahead, before markup, to develop a bill that will be supportive of families in its effort to assist victims of domestic violence.

On the following pages we will suggest some changes in the legislation that should be addressed either in the bill itself or in the language of the Report that accompanies this legislation.

RECOMMENDATION FOR REPORT LANGUAGE FOR HR 2977

from

The National Conference of Catholic Charities
and
The Family Service Association of America

July, 1979

1. "The Committee, while not specifying this in the legislation because it wishes to leave some discretion to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would strongly urge that the Department establish a Bureau of Families which would be comparable in status to that which has been created for children. The Committee believes such action to be consistent with the mission of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families established by this Administration in 1976.

"Within such a Bureau for Families should be the office with administrative responsibility for a program on Domestic Violence. Such an office should be logically located within a Family Bureau because violence in families not only affects the spouse involved but also the entire family structure including children and elderly parents.

"The Committee suggests that the Office on Domestic Violence within the Family Bureau structure engage in collection of data and basic research to determine the extent of violence in families. It should do this in conjunction with program administration which determines the kind of treatment having the most success in rehabilitating individuals and families."

2. "While the Committee is leaving some discretion in the legislation to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Committee intends that projects which would be supported by this grant in aid program would be required to offer a variety of services including family counseling. The Committee believes, however, that family counseling should be accessible to only those victims for whom it is feasible and acceptable.

"Further, the Committee directs the Department that prevention as provided by this legislation should not only reach the victim seeking emergency shelter and services away from the home (intervention) but also should include the victim who returns to his or her family (prevention). The majority of victims leaving a shelter return to their families. Assistance to a family in which there is violence, and rehabilitation for its members can occur if services are available beyond the time the victim is residing in the shelter. For those victims choosing not to return to the family environment, follow-up services are also needed."

END