

Testimony of

The Honorable Vincent J. Poppiti

April 16, 2002

The witness will take the stand her name is Dejanario Alexis Wade - she's six (6) years old, and she likes to be called Deja. When Deja was four (4) years old she and her two (2) year old brother witnessed the savage murder of their mother by their father in Wilmington, Delaware, on October 3, 1997.

Q. Deja, you said [your mother] tried to hide?

A. Mm-mmm.

...

Q. What happened after she hid under the bed?

A. He pulled her out by her - by her arm.

Q. And then what happened?

A. He stabbed her, started stabbing my mom.

Q. What did you do?

A. I yelled "stop."

Mr. Chairman - distinguished members of the Subcommittee,

- On behalf of the over three (3) million children each year who witness these horrific lesions of violence learning its terrible lessons and carrying its seeds into the next generation; and

- On behalf of the over one (1) million women who are battered each year by their husbands or partners;

I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of S. 570, which would establish a permanent Violence Against Women Office in the Department of Justice. My friend and former colleague on the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women, Director Stuart and I, along with other members of our leadership group participated in the preparation of a document entitled "Establishing a Permanent Office to Address Violence Against Women."

We believed then and I conclude now that:

- A permanent statutory Violence Against Women Office and its Director will reflect the importance that Congress and the Administration place on making the elimination of violence

against women a priority for the United States government and for the country.

In President Bush's letter accompanying his proclamation declaring October 2001 as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month he stated - specifically citing statistics involving violence against women - "As a Nation we must prioritize addressing the problem of domestic violence in our communities each day of the year . . . We can and must radically reduce and work to eliminate this scourge from our land . . ."

Referencing efforts on the part of federal, state and local governments; community leaders, health care professionals, teachers, employers, friends and neighbors, he said, "These collective efforts will contribute to peace in our homes, schools, places of work and communities and will help ensure the future safety of countless children and adults."

We believed then and I conclude now that:

- The establishment of the Violence Against Women Office will fulfill one of the yet unrealized expectations of Congress-articulated in the Report, "Safe Streets, Safe Homes" released by the Chair in September of 1999.

We believed then and I conclude now that:

- The establishment of the Violence Against Women Office will assure that succeeding Administrations continue to embrace and fully implement the provisions of the Violence Against Women Act - honoring the urgent call to action issued by the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women in July of last year - namely, "We Must End Violence Against Women. "

We believed then and I conclude now that:

- The Violence Against Women Office under the direct supervision of the Associate Attorney General will solidify policy within the Department of Justice that non-criminal justice services (including civil legal remedies and enforcement, non-legal victim advocacy services and other programs) will be an integral part of a Coordinated Community Response.

Moreover, when Attorney General Ashcroft released the web-based Tool Kit to End Violence Against Women- created as part of our Agenda for the Nation- he said, " As you know, to end violence against women we must change our culture, and all facets of society need to play a role."

Attorney General Ashcroft was correct, ending violence will require a change of culture and will demand a Coordinated Community Response, and I respectfully suggest that the stature of a statutory office is essential to establishing this Coordinated Community Response and policy development. Mr. Chairman as we speak, in Wilmington, Delaware a statutorily composed Fatal Incident Review Team is reviewing the murder of Deja's mom.

Q. What was your mom doing?

A. Screaming.

Q. Then what did you do after he stabbed your mom?

A. I stayed in my bed. .

Q. Did you see your mom?

...

A. Mm-mmm.

Q. Where was she?

A. Laying down on the floor dead.

Q. How did you know she was dead?

R. How did you know she was dead?

A. Because I kept on saying, "Mom, mom, answer me," and she wouldn't answer.

...

Q. You said that you were trying to talk to her?

A. Mm-mmm.

Q. And what happened?

A. She wouldn't answer me.

Q. How did you feel when your mom wouldn't answer you?

A. Lonely and sad.

Senator Biden, the National Agenda and its urgent call to action must be trumpeted and not muted, the President's call for a Coordinated Community Response and the Attorney General's call for a change of culture, collectively compel the government to pass your critically important legislation and create a statutory Violence Against Women Office with the stature such a commitment deserves.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to report to you on the impact that Violence Against Women S.T.O.P Formula Funding has had on the citizens in your home state. I attach for the sub committee's review a spreadsheet detailing each Agency which received S.T.O.P funds, the total amount of the funding, the program description and the Delaware Implementation Committee's view of program impact.

Violence Against Women Act funding in Delaware has provided an opportunity for both the expansion of existing programs and the introduction of innovative new programs offering direct services to domestic violence and sexual assault victims.

Violence Against Women Act funding has enhanced existing services to improve Delaware's criminal justice system in many ways; it allows the entry of protection orders in real time, creating a database immediately accessible to officers on the street; it puts advanced evidence collection technology in the hands of domestic violence officers; it enables more effective prosecution of perpetrators; and it places translation services within an immigrant community to break down barriers that have traditionally hindered, even prevented, battered women's attempts to leave violent homes.

We are erasing the boundaries among agencies to provide a continuum of seamless service delivery to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Delaware.

We are also erasing the boundaries of our vision of service delivery for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Delaware. This funding has provided incentive for agencies, even those that did not apply for or receive Violence Against Women Act funding, to consider next steps and to envision potential for domestic violence victim's service delivery and how we can reach that goal. This type of support and innovation, in addition to the core staff training, coordinated state-wide strategic planning, and technological advancements, is critical to the forward movement of treating victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as in preventing future victimization in Delaware.

In addition to making it possible for Delaware to have advocacy programs in each of the Family Courts and expanding shelter services, the funding also provides for legal representation in civil matters and provides for a broader, case management approach to serving victims of domestic violence.

We fund much-needed statewide domestic violence training for law enforcement and judicial officers. While the need for ongoing training on this issue exists, Violence Against Women Act funds enable all current state law enforcement and judicial officers to have a core of knowledge about domestic violence that can more easily be augmented in the future.

The reaction to our training has been encouraging.

The training was 'nothing short of enlightening - I was on the edge of my chair.

- James G. McGiffin, Jr., Executive Director, Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.

The strategic planning sessions themselves have been a benefit. It has been a great process to learn what's needed from service providers.

- Patricia M. Blevins, Vice-Chair, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Violence Against Women Act implementation Committee

The [Violence Against Women Act] grants Delaware has received for law enforcement training have united the law enforcement efforts of an entire state in combating domestic violence and abuse. Every police officer, probation and parole officer, animal control, victim advocate and child protective worker has been trained at the same table with one common goal - save lives and hold the batterer accountable.

-Sgt. Gerry Donovan, New Castle Police Department.

I never expected the level of quality and time that was given. I thought that I would be just a face in the crowd. I was wrong. The [Domestic Violence Advocacy Center staff] are angels.

-Project participant, Domestic Violence Advocacy Center.

I'm so glad there are people like you there to help the abused, no matter what type of abuse it is. Thank you so much!

-Project Participant, Hispanic Case Management Program.

They were there to help, listen and care for your well being. Its such a relief to know someone cares and is willing to take a step to help.

-Evaluation by program participant Domestic Violence Advocacy Center.

While Delaware has been ready and willing to accept a call to action to End Violence Against Women, S.T.O.P. Formula Funding has assured our ability to do so. The establishment of a permanent Violence Against Women Office assure that efforts in our state and across the nation are carried forward over time. When we in the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women began to develop an Agenda for the Nation we did so at the call of the Director of the Violence Against Women Office with the expectation that office did so on behalf of the Attorney General of the United States Department of Justice and the Secretary of the United State Department of Health and Human Services.

I would like to close my testimony in support of S. 570
by borrowing and paraphrasing some words from our Agenda:

A statutory Violence Against Women Office would be a tribute to those who have worked tirelessly to bring the issue of violence against women to our public consciousness, and most especially to the victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. A statutory Violence Against Women Office would serve to honor those whose work in crisis programs, within the justice system, and in health care and social service agencies helps victims recover and find safety. A statutory Violence Against Women Office would serve to applaud business and labor leaders, educators, religious and spiritual leaders, policymakers and others who have demonstrated their commitment to ending violence against women by developing needed policies, protocols and programs in communities throughout this country. A statutory Violence Against Women Office would serve to commend those men and women who have taken a public and private stand against violence. A statutory Violence Against Women Office would permit the urgent call to action necessary to change our culture and end

Violence against women; to be sounded from the highest levels of the government of the United States of America.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chief Judge Vincent J. Poppiti
Family Court
State of Delaware