

Senate Judiciary Committee  
SB 304  
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January 30, 2012

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee;

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today in support of SB 304, concerning the certification of batterer intervention programs in our State. I have been serving in some capacity in BIP programs for the last 18 years. I currently direct the Family Peace Initiative BIP program at the Center for Safety and Empowerment, a program of the YWCA here in Topeka.

There are many reasons why I would urge you to support this legislation. It is reasonable to me that the State of Kansas would establish a minimum standard for programs working with this challenging and dangerous population. It is reasonable to expect BIP programs to meet minimum standards of best practice to increase the safety of victims of domestic violence. It is reasonable to expect our legal systems to demand that programs meet a minimum standard instead of using substandard programming that has been shown to have little if any impact on addressing domestic violence. It is reasonable to hold programs accountable to demonstrate that they are pursuing best practice in their work. It is reasonable to expect those convicted of a DV related crime to undergo a certified assessment by a certified program to increase the ability to create safety for a victim and create a higher level of accountability for the batterer.

The Family Peace Initiative is currently a certified BIP program in the State of Kansas. I am proud of that distinction. I am also proud of results that we are seeing from our efforts. I recently submitted to Court Services in Shawnee County, the names of the 138 people who had completed our course in the last 4 years. I requested information on how many of those who have completed our program had reoffended since the time of their completion. We defined re offense as any new arrest or a new filing of a PFA. While the generally accepted rate of recidivism nationally is approximately 30%, you can imagine our surprise and excitement when we learned that only 12% of those who had completed FPI had reoffended. 12% is still too high, but we are beyond the expectations of those who practice nationally in our own field. Our commitment to a standard of operation that meets and often exceeds the State of Kansas minimum standards is directly related to the impact that we are having. At FPI, we know that batterers can change and victims can become safer. I would love to take the credit for our success, but I understand that this work requires a dedicated joint effort among many agencies in a community that are working together and meeting a minimum standard of performance.

The Family Peace Initiative has employed people to facilitate our classes who came from many walks of life. I am a Licensed Social Worker. I have employed Social Workers, a former law enforcement officer, a construction worker, a PhD Psychologist,

and a law school student. FPI has employed victims advocates and men who have graduated from our classes. FPI currently has a number of volunteers, who are either graduates of our classes, or the partners of graduates. Those who seem to have the greatest success in FPI as facilitators are those, not with a certain degree or license, but those with a deep understanding of domestic violence. However, with proper supervision, our staff commonly requires a year of involvement and training in our program before they reach an acceptable level of competency.

BIP work is hard work. BIP work is rewarding work. BIP work is never to be taken lightly. There can be serious consequences for mistakes, oversights, or the cutting of corners. I can speak, from my nearly twenty years of work in this field, to the fact that people who batter can stop. I believe that those who will not stop should be imprisoned. However, it is not enough to send those convicted of domestic violence to counseling, anger management, or subject them to fines. This bill is an important opportunity for the State of Kansas to raise the bar for programs that conduct these services. The bar is too low currently, and victims are endangered by the current lack of standard.