



OPDV Bulletin: The Governor's 2002 Justice, Freedom and Courage Awards to End Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence Awareness Month was kicked off at the Executive Mansion in Albany, where the recipients of the Governor's 2002 Justice, Freedom and Courage Awards to End Domestic Violence were honored on October 1. First Lady Libby Pataki presented each of the awardees with a crystal eagle in recognition of their strength, innovation, courage and tenacity in working to make a difference in the lives of victims of domestic violence.

Lifetime Visionary Award

Judith S. Kaye

Chief Judge, New York State Court of Appeals

Judith S. Kaye was appointed New York's Chief Judge in 1993 and is the first woman to occupy that post. She is also the first woman to serve on the Court of Appeals, the State's highest court, which she joined in 1993. Throughout her career, Judge Kaye has demonstrated a firm and active commitment to improving the response of the legal system to the complex issues posed by domestic violence.

One groundbreaking example of Chief Judge Kaye's initiative was the establishment of domestic violence courts that place a new emphasis on victim safety and offender accountability. The "one family, one judge" approach designates one judge to handle all criminal, family and matrimonial issues a particular case may present. This eliminates the confusion, cost, time and inconsistency often associated with multiple courts with multiple judges.

Chief Judge Kaye's commitment to achieving results and her openness to new ideas have distinguished her as a leader in court administration. From overhauling the jury system, creating specialized drug, community and commercial courts, to establishing a statewide network of child care centers for litigants in courthouses, she has championed innovative improvements in every corner of New York's judicial system.

Chief Judge Kaye is Chair of the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children; a trustee of Barnard College; a member of the Board of Editors of the New York State Bar Journal; President-Elect of the Conference of Chief Justices; Chair-Elect of the National Center for State Courts; and a member of the American Law Institute, the American College of Trial Lawyers and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has also served on various committees of the New York State Bar Association and the American Bar Association including the Commission on Domestic Violence.

Chief Judge Kaye is the author of numerous publications, particularly articles dealing with the legal process, state constitutional law, women in law, and professional ethics. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession's Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, the National Center for State Courts' William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence, New York Law School's Vanderbilt Medal, the Barnard College President's Medal, and the Gold Medal of the New York State Bar Association.

JUSTICE

The Justice Award is presented to an individual or organization within the criminal justice and legal systems who has made a demonstrated effort to prevent domestic violence, protect domestic violence victims, or hold offenders accountable for their behavior.

Capital District Women's Bar Association, Legal Project Inc.
Albany

In 1998, the Capital District Women's Bar Association secured funding for the development of its pro bono committee, now known as The Legal Project. The Legal Project, in turn, launched the Domestic Violence Legal Connection (DVLC), a multi-faceted program aimed at providing legal assistance to domestic violence victims and educating attorneys and the judiciary on a variety of legal issues unique to domestic violence.

DVLC offers free on-site legal consultations and workshops at area shelters, free legal representation in Family Court and representation on related civil matters. Recent initiatives to expand the scope of domestic violence services include providing leadership in forging collaboration with other providers in a multi-county initiative to address the need of immigrant victims.

DVLC also provides intensive, high-quality training to attorneys on legal strategies and procedures; this training is free if the attorney agrees to take on one pro bono case per year. These programs are geared to helping attorneys understand the safety needs of victims, how to use the legal system to hold batterers accountable, and how to protect the victim's interests so that she can remain independent.

In addition, DVLC actively provides technical assistance to other chapters of the New York Women's Bar Association and organizations in other states seeking to replicate DVLC's programs. Through this three-pronged approach - direct victim assistance, quality legal training, and organizational outreach and collaboration - DVLC has had a profoundly positive effect on victims, the judicial system, and the community at large.

Catherine Cerulli
Rochester

Catherine ("Kate") Cerulli is known as both a crusader and pioneer in the fight against domestic violence. During her first year of law school, Ms. Cerulli founded a student task force to assist victims of domestic violence in securing orders of protection. By the time she graduated, the program was so successful that the task force was formally established as the University of Buffalo Law School Family Violence Clinic, with Ms. Cerulli as the first faculty supervisor. At present, as the Director of Research for the Clinic, Ms. Cerulli trains law students and attorneys across the state to effectively represent domestic violence victims. She also provides domestic violence awareness training statewide to social and religious agencies, medical and legal professionals and advocates.

While employed by the Monroe County District Attorney's Office, Ms. Cerulli pioneered the "Stop Abuse in the Family Environment" Program (SAFE), which educates victims of misdemeanor domestic violence on the criminal justice system and domestic violence. Its success has caused it to be replicated in other counties in the State. She also headed up a multi-disciplinary task force to evaluate the success of the domestic violence part in Monroe County Family Court.

Ms. Cerulli's commitment to improving the legal system's response to domestic violence crosses both state and international borders. In 2000, Ms. Cerulli initiated contact with Rochester's sister city in the Ukraine to assist them with the development of then nonexistent services, shelters, and batterers'

programs. She helped four other cities reach out to their respective sister cities in the Ukraine to facilitate domestic violence intervention and prevention.

Ms. Cerulli is currently studying suicides among batterers and domestic violence-related homicide-suicides. Another research focus for Ms. Cerulli has been the impact of domestic violence on children.

FREEDOM

The Freedom Award is presented to residential and nonresidential domestic violence service providers, businesses, or organizations from the private sector and others in the community comprising the domestic violence response system including: health and human services, the faith community, education, and the media.

People Against Domestic Violence Carmel

People Against Domestic Violence (PADV) is a glowing example of community collaboration in the fight against domestic violence. Formed in 1982 under the sponsorship of Congressman Hamilton Fish Jr., PADV has dramatically improved community awareness and response in the complicated area of domestic violence. One of the primary reasons for its success is its ability to bring together individuals and organizations interested in domestic violence to share ideas and work cooperatively to identify and address unmet community needs and gaps in service. Just a few of the member organizations include: the Putnam District Attorney's Office, Putnam County Probation, Putnam-Northern Westchester Women's Center, and Putnam County Department of Social Services.

One example of PADV's success is its police training program. Drawing on the expertise of several of its member organizations, PADV implements training on investigation techniques, evidence collection, witness interviewing and referrals for victim services. PADV also coordinates a variety of fundraising activities. These proceeds are used to support the work of the organization and to fund special initiatives, including the purchase of cameras for all police cruisers to improve evidence collection in domestic violence cases.

Another achievement of PADV has been raising community awareness. PADV plans and coordinates an annual candlelight vigil in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness month. This well-attended event has not only improved community and media awareness of domestic violence, but has also increased the number of persons and organizations who are actively involved in PADV. They host an annual dinner to recognize and celebrate individuals and organizations that work tirelessly in the fight against domestic violence. The success of PADV is proof-positive that collaboration across organizational boundaries is not only possible, but also highly effective.

New York Asian Women's Center New York

The strain of acclimating to new homes, new languages, and new customs is stressful for most immigrant women. When this stress is coupled with domestic violence and cultural acceptance of violence against partners, immigrant women face substantial obstacles to a life free from domestic violence. Twenty years ago, the New York Asian Women's Center became the first organization in the eastern United States to focus on the problem of domestic violence in Asian communities. From its inception, the Center has assisted countless immigrant Asian victims in navigating the daunting path to independence and self-sufficiency.

The New York Asian Women's Center operates both residential and nonresidential programs for women

and their children. The staff, described as "passionate," "tireless," and "fluent in 15 languages," actively reaches out to women in Asian communities from several sites in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. The Center operates three shelters, additional counseling centers, and a 24-hour multilingual hotline. The Center, with the help of its 75+ volunteers, also offers court assistance, client advocacy, emergency shelter, counseling and support groups tailored to the particular needs of its clients. The Center actively collaborates with other agencies and government entities to fulfill the demand for assistance.

Moreover, as a result of the strong presence of the Center in several Asian communities, there is increasing public recognition that domestic violence is a problem in Asian communities and that it need not be tolerated.

COURAGE

The Courage Award is presented to a survivor of domestic violence who has helped victims and other survivors through the promotion of greater self-determination and empowerment.

Melissa Mahar Troy

As a survivor of domestic violence at only 18 years of age, Melissa Mahar has transformed her personal experience into a highly effective tool to educate teenagers in schools throughout the Capital District. By courageously sharing the details of her story, Ms. Mahar has brought home the message that domestic violence can happen to anyone, at any age, anywhere. Ms. Mahar's age, speaking skill, and candor permit members of her audiences to identify with her, thereby shattering the myth that domestic violence is something that happens only to other people. Her audiences leave her presentation with a keener sense of their own relationships as well as a better understanding of what domestic violence is, its danger signs and what resources are available to its victims.

In addition to public speaking, full-time employment, and raising her daughter, Ms. Mahar volunteers weekly at a local domestic violence shelter where she skillfully responds to hotline and crisis calls, counsels victims, coordinates a resource manual and helps around the shelter. Ms. Mahar is applauded for her courage, energy, and commitment to preventing and ending domestic violence.

Margarita Torres Bronx

"Look at me. I started with \$5.00, three kids, in the shelter system and I did it. I didn't go to college. I didn't have any economic support, but I did it. You can make it too."

This is the inspiring message Margarita ("Maggy") Torres shares with countless individuals and groups. After escaping her abuser, Ms. Torres created a totally new, highly successful and meaningful life for herself and her three sons. Since 1993, Ms. Torres has worked at the Kings County District Attorney's Office where she currently serves full time as a paralegal in their Domestic Violence Bureau. In her professional capacity, Ms. Torres shares her empowering story and message with victims as she assists them in navigating the legal system. She also meets regularly with assistant district attorneys and police officers to help them understand domestic violence and the tremendous obstacles victims encounter both within and outside the home. Most recently, Ms. Torres has begun speaking to adolescents about teen dating violence.

Outside her job, Ms. Torres devotes much of her energy to several programs and groups sponsored by New Settlement Apartments - a low-income housing complex - including Domestic Violence

Prevention, Teens and Violence in Dating, Domestic Violence - Residents in Shelters, United Neighborhood College, and the Elder Group. In addition to educating participants on domestic violence, Ms. Torres translates into Spanish written information developed or used by these groups.

Ms. Torres participates in a performance group that visits local domestic violence shelters, churches, and other community programs. The group performs skits and involves the audience in creating not only an understanding of domestic violence, but also a vision of a violence-free life and community.

Ms. Torres is involved in the "Voices of Women" organizing project of the Battered Women's Resource Center in Brooklyn where she advocates for improvements in the criminal justice, legal, human services, and child welfare systems.

Captions from photos taken at the Awards's Ceremony:

The Lifetime Visionary Award was bestowed upon Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye.

Judge Gail Prudenti accepted the award for Judge Kaye.

Wendy Durand (right), with First Lady Libby Pataki and Charlotte Watson, accepted the Domestic Violence Legal Connection's Justice Award.

Catherine "Kate" Cerulli received a Justice Award. Her sister, Jennifer, accepted the award on her behalf.

Several representatives of the People Against Domestic Violence (PADV) accepted a Freedom Award.

Tuhina De O'Connor accepted the Freedom Award on behalf of the New York Asian Women's Center.

Margarita ("Maggy") Torres, recipient of a Courage Award and a community college scholarship, with First Lady Libby Pataki and Charlotte Watson.

Melissa Mahar, received a Courage Award and a community college scholarship.

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