



February 17, 2015

TO: Rep. Maxine Grad, Chair
Rep. William Jewett, Vice-Chair
House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy
RE: H.103 – allowing a person to obtain a relief from abuse order against a family or household member based upon psychological abuse.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about H. 103.

When people think of domestic abuse, they often picture a battered woman who has been physically assaulted. But not all abusive relationships involve physical violence. Abusive relationships manifest in numerous ways, perhaps the most pervasive is psychological abuse. In fact, survivors of physical abuse tell us that the psychological and emotional abuse by their abusive partners is even worse than the physical assaults themselves.

Psychological abuse often follows a pattern and worsens over time. It includes: coercion, repeated humiliation, public degradation, belittling, isolation and control over other relationships, control over finances, aggression, verbal assaults, threats against the victim, loved ones and pets, and repeated intimidation. Often the unpredictability of such abusive behavior leads a victim into a constant state of fear and it is often the precursor to physical violence as well.

Escaping such systemic violation is daunting without the assistance of every possible tool at a victim's disposal. Supportive services and communities are not always enough. We know that relief from abuse orders are an invaluable tool for victims of physical abuse and we welcome this recognition that psychological abuse is worthy of the same assistance.

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence supports the creation of a law which allows a person to obtain a relief from abuse order against a family or household member based upon psychological abuse.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

~Auburn Watersong