

May 25, 2007

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
United State Senate
201 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act

Dear Senators Biden & Specter:

I am writing on behalf of the American Bar Association to express our appreciation to you for introducing the “National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act”, S. 1515. This legislation addresses the dire need to increase legal services for victims of domestic violence by harnessing the skills, enthusiasm and dedication of volunteer lawyers to create a coordinated, nationwide referral system to help domestic violence victims. If enacted, the measure will solicit lawyers, train them, organize them into a central network, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline will refer victims to statewide legal coordinators.

Domestic violence is a well-documented epidemic in America that hurts millions of families each year. Nearly one in three women will be a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime and between three and ten million children witness acts of domestic violence each year, which puts them at increased risk for engaging in juvenile crime and abusive relationships. Without a doubt, domestic violence permeates every aspect of victims’ lives and damages their physical, mental and emotional health as well as their participation in education systems and the workforce.

The ABA shares the belief expressed by other national organizations addressing access to justice for victims of domestic violence that there is a definite need to increase, safe, affordable, accessible, high-quality legal services to victims. In a 2003 study examining domestic violence, Professor Amy Farmer found that legal assistance is the most effective intervention for victims, but the cost of this intervention makes it inaccessible to many victims of family violence. Obtaining effective protection orders, initiating divorce proceedings

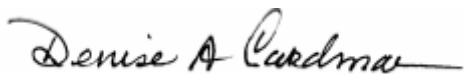
or designing safe child custody arrangements often enables battered women to take the first real step away from an abusive home. Yet the sad fact remains that thousands of the estimated one million victims of domestic violence go without representation every day in this country. It is estimated that legal service providers are only able to serve about 170,000 low-income domestic violence victims each year. At best then, less than one out of five low-income victims ever has access to a lawyer.

The National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act will enhance access to legal services for victims of domestic violence in the following ways:

- ★ Mandates the General Accounting Office to study the scope and quality of legal services available to victims of domestic violence across the country and to issue a report to Congress within a year;
- ★ Creates a National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Referral Project to be managed by the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence in partnership with other national domestic violence and pro bono organizations, including the National Domestic Violence Hotline;
- ★ Authorizes a Pilot Program to establish the National Attorney Network in five states; which would then be followed in two years by a National Rollout; and
- ★ Establishes the Domestic Violence Legal Advisory Task Force to provide on-going guidance regarding the network.

The ABA strongly supports the National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act and urges Congress to promptly enact this important legislation. We commend your leadership on this issue and appreciate your willingness to work with us to resolve this gaping hole in the legal system. The ABA Commission on Domestic Violence looks forward to being part of this collaborative effort to meet the tremendous demand for legal assistance for victims of domestic violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise A. Cardman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Denise A. Cardman
Acting Director