

Speaking Up

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IMPROVING STATE LEGISLATORS' RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“State legislators play a crucial role in ending the tragedy of family violence,” states *When Violence Hits Home, Domestic Abuse and Families*, a report recently released by the National Conference of State Legislatures’ (NCSL) Children and Families Program. Because laws that prosecute perpetrators and programs that help victims tend to be designed and supported by state and local lawmakers, the report aims to improve state legislators’ response to domestic violence. It includes an overview of domestic violence and the public’s response to abuse, and explains why state legislators are so important to preventing family violence.

When Violence Hits Home provides legislators with the information they need to make informed policy decisions on domestic violence. In addition to providing background information on abuse, the publication includes tips on how legislators can help victims of domestic violence, hold perpetrators accountable, and enhance community efforts to help women and children who are living in violent homes. The report’s Appendix summarizes significant federal laws regarding domestic violence.

When Violence Hits Home is divided into four chapters:

- **Chapter One** explores the prevalence of domestic violence and its impact on families and communities. It examines the dynamics of abusive relationships and lists some of the risk factors for abuse.
- **Chapter Two** provides an overview of the history of domestic violence and the public’s response to abuse. It describes the early social acceptance of abuse and the gradual change in attitudes towards domestic violence. It also gives an overview of current federal and state laws regarding domestic violence.
- **Chapter Three** describes the structure of domestic violence services and explains some options and services that are available to victims and their families. It identifies some of the challenges facing advocates for victims and domestic violence service providers, and highlights successful programs. The chapter also describes the role policy makers play in addressing the needs of families who are experiencing violence.

- **Chapter Four** focuses on domestic violence and children. It explores the connection between domestic violence and child abuse, and describes the affect that witnessing violence has on children. It also examines state policy responses to this issue.

“State legislators play a significant role in crafting systems that respond appropriately to victims of domestic violence and providing necessary resources. Legislators who understand the policy implications of domestic violence can create programs and opportunities to help families craft lives that are free of violence and to prevent the cycle of violence from repeating in the future,” concludes *When Violence Hits Home*.

When Violence Hits Home was written by Stephanie Walton, a policy associate at the NCSL. The report was funded by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

The report is available for purchase through NCSL's at <http://www.ncsl.org/public/catalog/pubs.cfm?prodid=016161>.

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