

Joan Wagnon

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Kansas Senate Judiciary Committee
Chairman Rick Wilborn

Re: Hearing on SB 215 January 22, 2020 at 10:30 AM Room 541-E

Chairman Wilborn and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

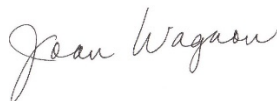
I am appearing in support of Senate Bill 215, section one, only. I understand that the sponsor is planning to remove Section 2 concerning child endangerment which I do not support.

As the former Executive Director of the Topeka YWCA, I was instrumental in the creation of the Battered Women's Task Force, and subsequently in an batterers alternative program which we developed. I was also involved in early efforts to create some of the domestic violence legislation as a member of the legislature.

I know that changes to these laws are never easy but are sometimes necessary. I believe Section One of this bill is necessary. Early legislative efforts to require offenders to attend a domestic violence offender assessment fell short. In some jurisdictions, courts cooperate and the assessment is ordered; in others, the language, "may order the offender to undergo the assessment and follow the recommendations" is ignored.

Shawnee County has excellent program resources for batterers, in part because we use the resources of the district court, not the municipal court. The Alternatives to Battering program was first developed at the YWCA, but soon we realized the difficulty of serving both victim and offender as clients in the same program. Now the Batterer Intervention program is operated by a private provider with excellent results. The courts, through the court services officers, track the participation and the results. Lack of funding could possibly pose hardship for some individuals but no more so than other requirements to attend drug treatment, or similar programs. When the offender is able to change the behavior, then families have been reunited successfully.

I expect that you will hear today from some of the program providers for both victims and offenders. They can give you more recent data on numbers served and effectiveness. From my perspective, however, it is time for Kansas to require these assessments following the first sentencing and require the offenders to follow the recommendations. It will protect family members, usually women, from further violence, and will intervene earlier in the cycle of violence instead of waiting until a second occurrence.



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