

Position Paper on Violence Against Women

The Junior Leagues of New Jersey State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) is a non-partisan committee made up of representatives of the eight Junior Leagues in New Jersey with a combined membership of 3,000 women across the state. SPAC advocates for initiatives and legislation to improve the safety and quality of life for women and children.

Combating violence against women has been a long-held position of SPAC along with supporting legislation that seeks to assist victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The membership also fully acknowledges that victims too often include the children in the household who are exposed to family violence. Such exposure may put them at risk of serious injury or even death. Yet many cases of domestic abuse go unreported for countless reasons. Perhaps chief among them is the fear that threats made by the abuser either directed toward the victim or the victim's children will be carried out. Another reason may be that abused and/or sexually assaulted women are often assumed to be fabricating a story and subject to demeaning cross-examinations when they do bring their cases to court. We are also aware of the role that stalking plays in cases of violence against women and that fear, domination, and control are the tools used to demoralize and debase women and their children regardless of whether any physical or sexual abuse has occurred. Therefore, understanding the similar nature and psychology of these crimes, we recognize that as we endeavor to protect the rights of victims of domestic and sexual abuse, we also fully support women and minor children who are victims and survivors of Human Trafficking. (Please refer to our position paper on human trafficking for more information).

Three bills are supported and monitored by NJ SPAC that provide assistance to these issues:

- Monica's Law (A1281/S1151), which would establish a domestic violence risk assessment pilot program, passed the Assembly on 2/4/13. There is currently no Senate Sponsor. In further review of this bill, we felt that an important unintended consequence is the "testimony" collected from a victim immediately after an assault could be used against her in court. Next steps are to review law that this bill would amend and review with community partners further.
- Anti-Stalking Civil Recourse Bill (A762) provides victims of stalking the right to sue for damages regardless of whether the abuser has been charged or found guilty of the crime as well as provides additional power to any criminal action. This bill passed the Assembly unanimously on 1/28/13, and received by the Senate Judiciary on 2/4/13. Next steps are to identify Senate Sponsorship and for SPAC to continue work with community partners to further evaluate concerns relating to the bill's associated alimony implications for divorce cases.
- Sexual Assault Victims Bill of Rights (A3084/S130), which seeks to recognize and protect the rights of victims of sexual assault, has strong sponsorship from Senator Weinberg in the 2012/2013 legislative session. Intrinsic issues exist with "bill of rights" terminology in they are based on broad principles with the potential for many unintended consequences. Next steps are to review with community partners and key sponsors, including Senator Weinberg.

SPAC maintains support for Monica's Law, Anti-Stalking Legislation and the Sexual Assault Victims Bill of Rights. SPAC's advocacy efforts to combat violence against women encompass gaining sponsorship for the bills and continuing our collaborative efforts with our community partners.

Junior Leagues of New Jersey State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC)

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Founded in 1901 by Mary Harriman, the Junior Leagues are charitable nonprofit organizations of women, developed as civic leaders, creating demonstrable community impact.

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