



Submitted to: Mandated Reporter Commission regarding proposal for revisions to Massachusetts Mandated Reporter Law

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I have advocated for survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence since 1994, first in New York City and then in the western Massachusetts region. I am a mandated reporter and have served on state task forces, local committees, and workgroups related to the intersections of domestic violence and child welfare. I am currently the Community Program Director at Safe Passage in Northampton, Ma.

Comments

Unfortunately, The Commission's process was devoid of input by advocates working in the field of domestic violence, (DV), who are concerned that the expansion of mandated reporting (MR), as laid out in the report, will be harmful to families in general and to DV survivors and their children in particular.

DCF already has solid guidelines related to working with families where domestic violence is a factor. Those guidelines can be found [here](#). The proposals for expanding MR contradict DCF's own best practices and will increase the burdens on an already over-taxed system of child protection.

Decontextualizing issues of poverty when considering a neglect report, as the Commission recommends, will inevitably impact families where domestic violence is a factor, as studies have shown a correlation between [domestic abuse](#), [poverty](#), and [homelessness](#).

Efforts to expand reporting without regard for poverty, disability, or other aspects of marginalization run counter to pivots in the field related to social justice and equity. Service providers have increased their awareness of [institutional biases](#) against poor parents, parents-of-color, LGBTQ+ parents, and disabled parents, and are seeking to reduce those risks. DCF must join efforts towards increased equity and justice for the marginalized families they are tasked with helping, rather than increasing the risk of specious reports made against them.

Exempting DV advocates from the proposed expansions, as suggested, will not protect survivors from over-reporting as they routinely come into contact with other types of providers as well. As a result of these expansions, survivor parents, (and non-survivor parents) will be driven away from seeking assistance due to the heightened risk of reports by helping professionals.



Acts of sexual abuse within large institutions such as sports systems, which was the original concern this Commission took up, will not be addressed by increased reporting against families, charging repair technicians with reporting, or threats of higher penalties levied against service providers. Such actions will not change the power structures within systems that allow abuse to flourish. Blaming parents and placing added pressure on service providers will only serve to harm families while absolving those who enjoy institutional protections and privileges.

Broad brush, decontextual, and punitive approaches such as the blanket reporting of any suspicion of child maltreatment have proven ineffective. We need only look at the "drug wars," the proliferation of the prison industrial complex, and the school-to-prison pipeline to see that power-over measures intended to control are detrimental to health and safety, particularly the health and safety of families of color, poor families, and those otherwise marginalized. What is needed are targeted, preventive approaches that include deeper training of personnel and addresses specific risks, such as those faced by young athletes at the mercy of predatory coaches and doctors.

DCF is charged with protecting children and should leverage its power to support and resource struggling families, rather than further traumatize and decimate them.

Thank you for your attention,
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