Missouri's Innocent Citizens: An Examination of Missouri's Response To Domestic Violence Incidents Against Children and Teens

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MISSOURI’S INNOCENT CITIZENS: AN EXAMINATION OF MISSOURI’S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS AGAINST CHILDREN AND TEENS

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Abstract

In 2010 the Missouri Attorney’s General’s Office created a Domestic Violence Task Force for the purpose of analyzing Missouri’s Domestic Violence laws. In 2011, the Missouri General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 320 which included several changes to Missouri’s domestic violence laws stemming from several recommendations from the Attorney General’s Task Force. While Missouri’s 2011 domestic violence law is a comprehensive solution to the many unaddressed needs of child and teen domestic violence victims, additional solutions need to be considered to fully address the problem. Those solutions may include creating special domestic violence and child abuse courts and creating educational programs in the community and schools to assist students and staff with spotting and resolving dating violence among teen couples.
I. Introduction

When most individuals think about childhood, they think about playing with friends in the school yard, driving their first car, and that first kiss. Most individuals do not think about watching their parents physically and verbally beat the other parent. Most do not think about children themselves being beaten by their parents, siblings or others. Most do not think about children themselves being sexually assaulted or physically and verbally abused by their boyfriend or girlfriend.

What most individuals do not think about is that domestic violence affects over 3.3 million children who witness violence against their mothers or female caretakers.\(^1\) That one in three teenagers have experienced violence in their dating relationships and that women ages 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence.\(^2\) That includes teenagers in the highest risk pool of domestic violence victims.

In September 2010, Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster created a domestic violence task force to examine Missouri’s domestic violence laws and identify recommendations for change to the legislature.\(^3\) The task force was given the duty of conducting the first comprehensive review of all Missouri domestic violence laws in 30 years.\(^4\) Missouri Governor Jay Nixon signed Senate Bill No. 320 into law on July 12, 2011.\(^5\)

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The legislation is credited with giving children and teens new protections from abusive relationships. While Missouri’s 2011 domestic violence law is a comprehensive solution to the many unaddressed needs of child and teen domestic violence victims, additional solutions need to be considered to fully address the problem.

I. Domestic Violence Against Children: A Look at the Problem and its Effects

Domestic violence affects children as witnesses and victims. Every year an estimated 15.5 million children live in homes in which one parent’s violence against the other parent occurred at least once in the past year. These children will be affected in different ways depending on several factors including age, relationship to both the batterer and battered, support systems, and the intensity, frequency, and type of abuse. Exposure to violence has been found to be a significant factor in predicting violent behavior of children and teenagers.

Children are affected in different ways by witnessing domestic violence. Some children may exhibit external characteristics such as being more aggressive and anti-social while others suffer from anxiety, depression and trauma symptoms. Studies suggest that children who witness or are subject to domestic violence are at a much

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higher risk of becoming a bully or a victim of bullies.\textsuperscript{11} The study attributes this to the child’s observation of what their primary caregivers do and then mimicking the violent act because the child believes it is acceptable.\textsuperscript{12}

A child’s cognitive abilities are often affected.\textsuperscript{13} A study found that children who had been exposed to family violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder including bed-wetting, nightmares and a higher risk of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu.\textsuperscript{14}

The effects of exposure to domestic violence falls within three categories: behavioral, social and emotional problems; cognitive and attitude problems; and long-term problems.\textsuperscript{15} Behavioral, social, and emotional problems generally include higher levels of aggression, anger, hostility, oppositional behavior, disobedience, fear, anxiety, withdrawal, depression, and low self-esteem.\textsuperscript{16}

Cognitive and attitude problems include symptoms of low cognitive abilities, poor school performance, lack of conflict resolution skills, limited problem solving skills, pro-violence attitude, and belief in rigid stereotypes or male dominance.\textsuperscript{17} Long-term

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Chevon Kothari, \textit{The Link Between Bullying and Domestic Violence}, Mariposa County Project Respect, http://mariposarespect.net.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Id.
\end{itemize}
problems include higher levels of adult depression and trauma symptoms and increased use of violence in adult relationships.\textsuperscript{18}

A number of factors are used in a comprehensive assessment to determine the effects of domestic violence and the child’s ability to recover.\textsuperscript{19} These factors include the nature of violence, coping strategies and skills, age of the child, elapsed time since exposure, gender, and presence of child physical or sexual abuse.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to threats of direct violence by loved ones and witnessing domestic violence against loved ones, teens also have to deal with romantic relationship abuse.\textsuperscript{21} A survey taken by Liz Claiborne Inc.’s Love Is Not Abuse Program found that 43\% of college women experience violence and abusive dating behaviors.\textsuperscript{22} One in three college women experience abuse in their relationships.\textsuperscript{23}

Children are direct and indirect victims of domestic violence or indirect victims of violence inflicted on a parent or other loved ones. Children and teens are also victims of a violent boyfriend or girlfriend. The effects of such abuse affect all aspects of a child’s life and require comprehensive solutions.

\textsuperscript{18} Id.

\textsuperscript{19} Id.

\textsuperscript{20} Id.

\textsuperscript{21} Id.

\textsuperscript{22} Id.

II. Missouri’s 2011 Response to Domestic Violence Against Children

In 2011 the Missouri General Assembly passed and sent to the Governor Senate Bill 320.Senate Bill 320 was based on several recommendations for statutory changes by the Attorney General’s Task Force.

The first recommendation and change to the Missouri Revised Statutes was to provide consistency in terminology for orders of protection of both children and adults. Prior to the 2011 law, Section 455.010 of the Missouri Revised Statutes contained general definitions of adult orders of protection including defining the term “adult” as age seventeen or older. Section 455.501 of the Missouri Revised Statutes contained general definitions of child orders of protection including defining “adult” as age eighteen or older.

The 2011 law addresses this inconsistency in terminology by repealing Section 455.501 in its entirety and replacing the definitions of Section 455.010. Section 455.010.3 defines “child” as “any person under seventeen years of age unless otherwise emancipated.” Section 455.010.2 defines “adult” as “any person seventeen years of age or older or otherwise emancipated.” Thus, Missouri law now defines

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25 Id.

26 Id. at 7.

27 Id.

28 Id.


31 Id.
anyone under seventeen that is not emancipated as a child and any person seventeen or older and those who are emancipated as adults.

Another inconsistency in terminology included how the term family and household member was defined.\textsuperscript{32} Previously, under Section 455.200 (3) family or household member was defined as being a spouse, former spouse, person living with another person whether or not as a spouse, parent or other adult person related by consanguinity or affinity who is residing or has resided with the person committing domestic violence and dependents of such person.\textsuperscript{33} This definition was inconsistent with Section 455.501 (2) defining adult household member as any person 18 years of age or older or an emancipated child who resides in the same dwelling as the victim.\textsuperscript{34}

Senate Bill 320 repealed Section 455.501 in its entirety and removed the family or household member definition from Section 455.200 replacing those definitions with one single definition of family and household member under Section 455.010.\textsuperscript{35} The 2011 change made Section 455.010 a definition section for the entire Chapter 455.\textsuperscript{36} Now family or household member is defined to include “spouses, former spouses, any person related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently residing together or have resided together in the past, any person who is or has been in a continuing social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim and anyone who has a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or resided together at any

\textsuperscript{32} Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 7.


\textsuperscript{35} Senate Bill 320, Supra note 27, at 1.

\textsuperscript{36} Mo. Rev. Stat. §455.010 (August 2011).
Therefore, now the term family or household member has one definition for the entire Chapter 455.

Other terminology inconsistencies between adult and child protective orders addressed by the legislature involve the terms abuse and domestic violence. In adult orders, abuse was defined under Section 455.010 (1) to include but is not limited to assault, battery, coercion, harassment, sexual assault or unlawful imprisonment. Child orders under, Section 455.501 (1) defines abuse as “any physical injury, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse inflicted on a child other than by accidental means by an adult household member, or stalking of a child…”

The 2011 law addresses this issue by redefining “abuse” to include “but not limited to the occurrence of any of the following acts, attempts or threats against a person who may be protected…except abuse shall not include abuse inflicted on a child by accidental means by an adult household member or discipline of a child, including spanking in a reasonable manner.” Those acts include assault, battery, coercion,

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37 Id.

38 Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 7.


41 Mo. Rev. Stat. §455.010 (2011). As use in this Section, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise, the following terms shall mean:

1. “Abuse” includes but is not limited to the occurrence of any of the following acts, attempts or threats against a person who may be protected pursuant to this Section, except abuse shall not include abuse inflicted on a child by accidental means by an adult household member or disciple of a child, including spanking, in a reasonable manner:
   a) “Assault”, purposely or knowingly placing or attempting to place another in fear of physical harm;
   b) “Battery”, purposely or knowingly causing physical harm to another with or without a deadly weapon;
   c) “Coercion”, compelling another by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which the latter has a right to abstain or to abstain from conduct in which the person has a right to engage;
   d) “Harassment”, engaging in a purposeful or knowing course of conduct involving more than one incident that alarms or causes distress to an adult or child and serves no legitimate purpose. The course of conduct must be such as would caused a reasonable adult or child to suffer substantial emotional distress and must actually cause substantial emotional distress to the petitioner or child. Such conduct might include, but is not limited to:
harassment, sexual assault, unlawful imprisonment. Under the harassment definition of Section 455.010.1 Subsection (D) adds the term “child” to the term adult so that children are also protected under the harassment definition. The law defines harassment as engaging in purposeful or knowing conduct involving more than one incident that alarms or causes distress of an adult or “child” and serves no legitimate purpose. The conduct must actually cause substantial emotional distress.

a. Following another about in a public place or places;
b. Peering in the window or lingering outside the residence of another; but does not include constitutionally protected activity;
e) “Sexual assault”, causing or attempting to cause another to engage involuntarily in any sexual act by force, threat of force, or duress;
f) “Unlawful imprisonment”, holding, confining, detaining or abducting another person against that person’s will;

(2) “Adult”, any person seventeen years of age or older or otherwise emancipated;
(3) “Child”, any person under seventeen years of age unless otherwise emancipated;
(4) “Court”, the circuit or associate circuit judge or a family court commissioner;
(5) “Domestic violence”, abuse or stalking, as both terms are defined in this section;
(6) “Ex parte order of protection”, an order of protection issued by the court before the respondent has received notice of the petition or an opportunity to be heard on it;
(7) “Family” or “household member”, spouses, former spouses, any person related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently residing together or have resided together in the past, any person who is or has been in a continuing social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim, and anyone who has a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or have resided together at any time;
(8) “Full order of protection”, an order of protection issued after a hearing on the record where the respondent has received notice of the proceedings and has had an opportunity to be heard;
(9) “Order of protection”, either an ex parte order of protection or a full order of protection;
(10) “Pending”, exists or for which a hearing date has been set;
(11) “Petitioner” a family or household member who has been a victim of domestic violence, or any person who has been the victim of stalking, or a person filing on behalf of a child pursuant to section 455.503 who has filed a verified petition pursuant to the provisions of section 455.020 or section 455.505;
(12) “Respondent”, the family or household member alleged to have committed an act of domestic violence or person alleged to have committed an act of stalking, against whom a verified petition has filed or a person served on behalf of the child pursuant to section 455.503;
(13) “Stalking”, is when any person purposely and repeatedly engages in an unwanted course of conduct that causes alarm to another person when it is reasonable in that person’s situation to have been alarmed by the conduct. As used in this subdivision:
a) “Alarm” means to cause fear of danger of physical harm;
b) “Course of conduct” means a pattern of conduct composed of repeated acts over a period of time, however short, that serves no legitimate purpose. Such conduct may include, but is not limited to, following the other person or unwanted communication or unwanted contact; and
c) “Repeated” means two or more incidents evidencing a continuity of purpose.

42 Id.
43 Id.
44 Id.
45 Id.
Another disparity under the former law existed in what had to be proven to grant an adult order compared to a child order.\textsuperscript{46} To grant an adult order the petitioner must have proven allegations of stalking or abuse.\textsuperscript{47} For a child order of protection proof of only abuse was allowed. Thus, under the prior law children lacked the ability to receive an order of protection based on stalking.

As a result of this disparity Section 455.110(5) now defines domestic violence as “abuse or stalking” for both child and adult protective orders.\textsuperscript{48} The current law now recognizes one definition of “domestic violence” for both children and adults to encompass both abuse and stalking.

Stalking is defined under Section 455.010 (13) as being “when any person purposely and repeatedly engages in an unwanted course of conduct that causes alarm...”\textsuperscript{49} The statute goes further to require that the situation in which alarm is created must be reasonable.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, stalking can be broken down into various components of (1) purpose, (2) repeatedly, (3) engages in unwanted course of conduct, (4) causes alarm, and (5) that alarm is reasonable.\textsuperscript{51} “Alarm” is defined as causing fear of danger of ‘physical’ harm.\textsuperscript{52} Other important terms defined in the statute include ‘course of conduct’ meaning a pattern of conduct of repeated acts over a period of time.\textsuperscript{53} The

\textsuperscript{46} Attorney General's Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 7.

\textsuperscript{47} Id at 8.


\textsuperscript{49} Id.

\textsuperscript{50} Id.

\textsuperscript{51} Id.

\textsuperscript{52} Id.

\textsuperscript{53} Id.
period of time may be short and there may be no legitimate purpose.\textsuperscript{54} The statute goes further to suggest, but not limit the conduct to actions including following another person, and unwanted communication or contact.\textsuperscript{55} Finally, “repeated” is defined as two or more incidents showing a continuity of purpose.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, now children have the ability to obtain a protective order based strictly on stalking.

In the former law the term “pending” was not defined in Section 455, but was used in Section 455.050 and Section 455.513 which allowed for manipulation by a respondent filing for divorce or custody after service of an ex parte order of protection, but prior to the hearing on the full order.\textsuperscript{57} Section 455.050(3) and Section 455.513(1) both prohibited a court awarding custody of a minor child when a prior order is “pending or has been made…”\textsuperscript{58} Senate Bill 320 addressed this by defining “pending” as “existing or for which a hearing date has been set.”\textsuperscript{59} This definition will close the loop hole allowing respondents to get around the prohibition once a hearing date is set for an ex parte order of protection.

Another recommendation from the task force regarded orders of protection against children and teens. The former law did not allow teenagers under seventeen to have an adult protective order against them by someone seventeen or older.\textsuperscript{60} Teenagers under

\textsuperscript{54}Id.
\textsuperscript{55}Id.
\textsuperscript{56}Id.
\textsuperscript{57}Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 7.
\textsuperscript{58}Id.
\textsuperscript{60}Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 14.
the age of eighteen could not obtain a child order of protection for themselves against another teen.\(^\text{61}\)

To address this the legislature added a provision giving juvenile or family courts exclusive original jurisdiction in proceedings involving an order of protection pursuant to Chapter 455, when the respondent is less than 17 years of age.\(^\text{62}\) Additionally, Section 455.035 provides for a court to grant ex parte orders of protection.\(^\text{63}\) Senate Bill 320 adds to the language of Section 455.035(3) and Section 455.513 providing that if there is jurisdiction under Section 211.031 because the respondent is less than seventeen years of age then the court shall transfer the case to juvenile court for a hearing on a full order of protection.\(^\text{64}\) Thus, under the 2011 law children and teens seventeen years of age and younger can obtain or be subject to a full order of protection if it is heard and filed in a juvenile or family court.

The task force also recommended a change in statutory language allowing the court to provide that a full order of protection of one year can be renewed automatically with no limits.\(^\text{65}\) The previous statutory language limited the duration of orders of protection to one year with the only possible renewal by motion of the guardian ad litem or children’s advocate.\(^\text{66}\) The result is the child must return to court if the threat still exists in order to obtain a renewal.\(^\text{67}\) The legislature left the language in Section 455.516(1)

\(^{61}\) Id.


\(^{65}\) Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 15.

\(^{66}\) Id.

\(^{67}\) Id.
limiting a full protection order to not more than one year.68 The legislature added language that upon a finding in the best interest of the child the court may add a provision that any full order of protection for one year shall automatically renew unless the respondent requests a hearing by thirty days prior to the expiration of the order.69 In addition, if the respondent files an objection with the court then notice of the date set for the hearing must be personally served upon the petitioner by personal process server or by sheriff or police officer at least three days before the hearing.70

Missouri Revised Statute Section 455.085 also addresses arrest for violations of orders of protection.71 This section has provided that law enforcement may arrest a person who has committed a violation of law that was abuse or assault against a family or household member if there is probable cause for the officer to believe the violation occurred even if it did not occur in the officer’s presence.72 Under the former statute, a violation of an order of protection by the respondent who visits the petitioner’s place of employment or school was only subject to a civil motion for contempt.73 Missouri Revised Statute Section 455.085 previously found a violation of an ex parte order of protection was a Class A Misdemeanor if there was a violation of the terms and conditions when it regarded abuse, stalking, child custody, communication initiated by

69 Id.
70 Id.
72 Id.
73 Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 18.
the respondent or entrance upon the premises of the petitioner’s dwelling unit. The 2011 legislation adds entrance upon the premises of the petitioner’s employment or school or being within a certain distance of petitioner or a child of petitioner to criminal penalties as a Class A Misdemeanor. Thus, under the new statutory scheme criminal violations of an order of protection are committed by the respondent who visits the petitioner’s place of employment or school. This gives petitioners a criminal remedy in addition to the civil motion for contempt. Under previous and current law the respondent commits a Class D Felony if he or she has previously violated an order of protection within the last five years.

Therefore, Senate Bill 320 resulted in various improvements and protections for children and teens including correcting inconsistencies in terminology, allowing orders of protection to be entered against children seventeen years of age or younger and including schools as a location where criminal sanctions may be imposed if an order of protection is violated.

III. Possible Improvements for the Future

Senate Bill 320 took the first steps in 30 years to protect teens and children from domestic violence. Improvements are needed to better protect children and teens. Some suggestions include implementing a family court model to address domestic violence and child abuse cases and targeting domestic violence in teen dating by providing staff and students with training to recognize the signs of abuse and ways to address it.

\[74\] Id.


\[76\] Id.
These suggestions may better protect children and teens from domestic violence. However, implementation is thorny. First, both suggestions incur cost. In the current budgetary climate states and non-profit organizations find it difficult to absorb the cost of such programs. For instance, this difficulty is shown in the fiscal year 2010 Missouri’s budget. Missouri’s legislature appropriated $4.75 million of general revenue to domestic violence programs.\(^{77}\) The Governor withheld 15% of that budget because of budgetary issues.\(^{78}\)

The first suggestion of creating a special family court model for domestic violence and child abuse would be designed to address traditional problems of domestic violence such as withdrawn charges, threats against victims, lack of defendant accountability, and high recidivism.\(^{79}\) Domestic violence courts address these problems by intense judicial scrutiny of the defendant and use of social services for the victim and violator.\(^{80}\) The ideal court would work with the prosecution, defense, victims advocate, and social services to ensure that the defendant and victim are separated, that defendant does not intimidate the victim, that the defendant contemplates whatever batterers program is ordered and with all terms of the an entered protective order.\(^{81}\)

Currently, the use of domestic violence courts is varied throughout the State, but mainly limited to areas of higher population. Saint Louis County has implemented a domestic violence court model in which domestic violence cases are assigned to a

\(^{77}\) Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence, supra note 32, at 28.

\(^{78}\) Id.


\(^{80}\) Id.

\(^{81}\) Id.
limited number of family court divisions.\textsuperscript{82} The courts stated purpose is the “increased safety for victims and their children, increased accountability for offenders, and establishing a coordinated community response.”\textsuperscript{83} Saint Louis County has also implemented a Batterer Compliance Program.\textsuperscript{84} This program lasts 26 to 52 weeks in which the defendants are taught essential skills of healthy relationships.\textsuperscript{85}

Another example of domestic violence courts already in action exist in Missouri’s Thirteenth Circuit Court composed of Boone and Callaway counties, which mounts a special domestic violence docket.\textsuperscript{86}

Thus, domestic violence courts are viable in Missouri. Their continued development would likely ease the regular criminal court docket and provide more concentrated care for both the defendants and the victims. While creating such a docket in larger circuits is likely beneficial and economically feasible, smaller and more rural circuits may find it difficult to finance such a special court.

Domestic violence programs in public schools and communities are possible ways to educate and reduce violence. There are educational programs currently available for schools to use. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has designed an initiative known as “Choose Respect”.\textsuperscript{87} “Choose Respect” is an initiative

\textsuperscript{82} Domestic Violence Court, Saint Louis County Circuit Court, http://www.stlouisco.com/YourGovernment/CountyDepartments/StLouisCountyCircuitCourt/DomesticViolenceCourt.

\textsuperscript{83} Id.

\textsuperscript{84} Batterer Compliance Program, Saint Louis County Circuit Court, http://www.stlouisco.com/LawandPublicSafety/CircuitCourt/DomesticViolenceVCourt/BattererCompliance.

\textsuperscript{85} Id.


\textsuperscript{87} Choose Respect Program, United States Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2010), www.cdc.gov/chooserespect.
designed to teach educators how to take an active role in shaping characteristics of healthy relationships.\textsuperscript{88} “Choose Respect” targets educating school faculty and staff to be proactive in monitoring and altering characteristics of unhealthy relationships before teens develop an acceptance of unhealthy relationship characteristics.\textsuperscript{89}

Another program is the Domestic Violence Prevention Program designed and funded by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Los Angeles, California.\textsuperscript{90} The program provides a toll free information line, prevention education, outreach events and community awareness.\textsuperscript{91} The toll free information line is available 24 hours a day to provide information on domestic and teen dating violence prevention and legal rights and referral to shelter information.\textsuperscript{92} The prevention education consists of community workshops, a youth leadership program for high school students, and an 8 week class on Domestic Violence Prevention and Healthy Relationships in the Family available at request.\textsuperscript{93} Community awareness and outreach events consist of public service announcements and services by professionals discussing domestic violence issues with the community.\textsuperscript{94}

These programs provide just a few examples of proven techniques and solutions to addressing violence perpetrated by and against children and teens. Opponents of

\textsuperscript{88} Id.
\textsuperscript{89} Id.
\textsuperscript{90} Domestic Violence Prevention Program, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (2009), http://www.maldef.org/leadership/programs/domestic_violence/.
\textsuperscript{91} Id.
\textsuperscript{92} Id.
\textsuperscript{93} Id.
\textsuperscript{94} Id.
these programs will suggest that the problem continues to be financial. One suggestion for funding programs in schools and the community may be to have schools establish a special account for domestic violence education programs in which parents can donate in exchange for a tax credit. However, the above programs have all been provided at little or no cost to the government or taxpayer. Schools and community organizations can look to private organizations and corporations as a funding source. The Domestic Violence Prevention Program by the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund is funded by community support and contributions by Verizon Wireless.95 There are also several federal government grants available through the Department of Education, Administration for Children and Families and Safe Schools, Healthy Students.96 Thus, programs designed for schools and community outreach to educate parents, teachers, and students about domestic violence have substantial financial support from federal government and private foundations. These programs could be implemented at minimal cost to schools, the public and local governments.

The biggest impediment to any solution suggested has been the ability to finance it. Looking at how other programs are financed may help the General Assembly develop unique and viable programs that assist children, teens and other victims of domestic violence. Additionally, private foundations provide large amounts of financial and other supports for educational programs.

96 Id.
IV. Conclusion

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster took very important steps in 2010 to furthering protection of domestic violence victims in Missouri by forming the Attorney General’s Domestic Violence Task Force. Missouri’s 2011 updated domestic violence law based on the recommendations of the task force have improved by correcting inconsistencies in terminology, allowing orders of protection to be entered against children seventeen years of age or younger and including schools as a location where criminal sanctions may be imposed if an order of protection is violated. However, the law still lacks comprehensive solutions necessary to address the types of teen and child domestic violence and the General Assembly should continue to look for effective and financially viable and socially beneficial solutions.