

SENATE WOMEN'S ISSUES, CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 419

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 22, 1996

The Senate Women's Issues, Children and Family Services Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 419 with committee amendments.

As amended, the bill establishes a 21-month "Domestic Violence Resource Center Demonstration Program." The Division of Youth and Family Services in the Department of Human Services is authorized to establish three domestic violence resource centers in three different counties, which would provide evaluation and treatment services for persons who have been found guilty of committing an act of domestic violence and ordered by the court to receive domestic violence counseling and services.

Services offered by the centers would focus on intervention with the goal of ending the offenders' violent behavior. Upon court order, an offender would receive an initial assessment and evaluation by the center with a recommendation to the court for an intervention plan. In addition to assessing the person's history of domestic violence, the centers would conduct screenings for alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness and other related problems, and where indicated, would refer the person to other agencies specializing in such problems. Treatment and services provided by the center would include educational sessions concerning domestic violence, including criminal, legal, social and personal consequences of violent behavior. Attendance at any of the programs provided by the centers and referral agencies would be enforceable by court order, and a willful failure to attend the programs could result in a finding of contempt.

The bill requires the centers to work in conjunction with the domestic violence service agency of the county to provide outreach services to domestic violence victims. Outreach services would include information for victims concerning their legal rights and remedies, community resources and other available services.

The bill further establishes an 11-member Domestic Violence Resource Center Advisory Committee. It also directs the division to contract with an independent, professional agent to evaluate the demonstration program. No later than three months prior to the

expiration of this bill, the division shall report the results of the study to the Governor, the Legislature, the Attorney General and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Lastly, the bill appropriates \$750,000 to the Department of Human Services and provides that \$515,000 of that amount is designated for the establishment of the Domestic Violence Resource Centers; \$75,000 for victim outreach services through the designated domestic violence agencies or their designees; \$60,000 for the cost of an independent evaluation, and \$100,000 for the division to perform the administrative duties.

The committee amended the bill to change the definition of a "domestic violence resource center" to require that any court can refer an individual to participate in the programs offered by the resource centers. The committee also amended the bill to require that an agency applying to the Division of Youth and Family Services for participation in the demonstration program document that it is in compliance with the division's rules and regulations. The committee also amended the bill to delete the provisions of subsection d. of section 4 of the bill which required that the division approve any application submitted by an agency for the establishment of a domestic violence resource center.

The bill was amended by the committee to include a representative of the Administrative Office of the Courts and the State Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy and the Department of Corrections on the Domestic Violence Resource Center advisory committee. The committee also amended the bill to reduce the number of service providers represented on the Advisory Committee from six to three.

The bill was also amended by the committee to require that the \$200 evaluation fee be used to support the programs and counseling services offered to the offenders referred to the center or to cover the counseling costs incurred by referrals to outside agencies. The amendment also requires the offenders to pay all fees associated with services they received from the referral agencies. If an individual can not pay the fees services to that individual would not be denied services.

The committee also amended the bill to require that a center notify the court immediately of a defendant's failure to report to a domestic violence resource center for evaluation. The court would then be required to initiate contempt proceedings. The amendment would also require the center to notify the court and the offender who was referred to another agency for additional services of the offender's noncompliance with a court order after two, unexcused absences. The court would then be required to initiate contempt proceedings.

Finally, the bill was amended to require, that no later than three months prior to the expiration date of the bill, the division report to the Governor, the Legislature, the Attorney General and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the results of the evaluation study of the demonstration program.