
PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE

**Legal, Medical, Social, and Faith-Based
Strategies for Protecting Children and Families**

**Edited by
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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Introduction</i>	xix
<i>About the Editors and Contributors</i>	xxix

Chapter 1: Ending Domestic Violence Begins With Holding Abusers Accountable

Barry Goldstein

Why Domestic Violence Isn't Treated As Seriously As It Should Be	1-2
Good Policy Depends On Good Data—And Good Data On DV Is Hard To Come By	1-2
Abusers Push Back	1-3
Harmful Practices That Actually Help Abusers, Not Victims	1-4
Failure to Make An Arrest	1-4
Misguided Leniency	1-5
Intimidation and Witness Tampering	1-6
Prioritizing Protection Orders	1-6
When Police Are Abusers	1-6
Dutchess County: When Bad DV Practices Led to Tragedy	1-7
Communities With Successful Responses to DV Crime: The Quincy Model	1-9
Nashville and San Diego	1-11
Other Communities With Effective Responses	1-13
High Point, North Carolina	1-13
Child Sexual Abuse Crimes	1-17
High Cost of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse	1-19
How Society Can Dramatically Reduce Domestic Violence	1-20
Make It Easier for DV Victims to Leave	1-20
Take Domestic Violence Seriously	1-21
Consequences for Abusers	1-21
Strict Enforcement of Domestic Violence Crimes, Protective Orders, and Probation Rules	1-22
Coordinated Community Responses	1-23
Importance of Using Current Scientific Research	1-24
Avoid Failed Responses	1-25

Chapter 2: How Attorneys Can Support Survivors—In Court, and In Life

Elizabeth Liu

Client-Centered Representation	2-2
Trauma-Informed Representation	2-3
Safety Planning	2-5
Civic Protection Orders	2-6
Understanding Domestic Violence Dynamics	2-8
Working With Guardians Ad Litem	2-9
Advocate on Behalf of the Survivor Within the Criminal Legal System	2-11
Restorative Justice	2-12
Conclusion	2-13

Chapter 3: How Refusing to Believe Women Can Undermine Their Children’s Health for Life or Kill Them: Domestic Violence, Child Custody and ACES

Lynn Hecht Schafran, J.D.

Origins of the National Judicial Education Program (NJEP)	3-4
The Lorena Weeks Title VII Case: <i>Weeks v. Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph</i>	3-5
The Attorney’s Fee Challenge	3-5
Origins of the Task Forces on Gender Bias in the Courts	3-6
The Task Forces’ Findings	3-7
Divorce	3-7
Child Support.	3-8
Custody	3-8
Domestic Violence.	3-9
Rape, Juveniles and Prostitution	3-9
Damages	3-10
Overview of the Treatment of Women in the Courts	3-10
Credibility in the Courts: Why Is There A Gender Gap?	3-10
Collective Credibility.	3-11
The Ultimate Insult to Women’s Credibility—Chief Justice Rehnquist Undermines Then-Senator Joe Biden’s Violence Against Women Act	3-12
Contextual Credibility	3-13
Consequential Credibility	3-14
The Problems With Custody Evaluations	3-17
Outsourcing Decisions to “Neutral” Evaluators.	3-17
What We’ve Learned from the ACES Research	3-18
Outside Evaluators Introduce Gender Bias into Court Decision-Making.	3-19
Problems With Evaluators Are Rife	3-19
The Arizona Court Study	3-20
The Center for Judicial Excellence.	3-23

The Saunders Study	3-25
Kayden’s Law	3-28
Domestic Violence, Developing Brains, and the Lifespan:	
New Knowledge From Neuroscience	3-29
Defining Domestic Violence.	3-31
The Social Science Is Confirmed and Explained by the Neuroscience. . . .	3-32
The Neuroscience	3-33
What Can a Judge Do for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence? . . .	3-34
Implications for the Courts of the New Knowledge From Neuroscience.	3-35
Abuse and Neglect	3-35
Custody and Visitation	3-36
Custody Evaluators.	3-37
The Hague Convention.	3-37
Judicial Education.	3-38
Conclusion	3-38

Chapter 4: Family Court Shortcuts That Short Circuit Children’s Lives

Barry Goldstein

Shortcut Started on Day 1 of the Court Response to Domestic Violence.	4-2
Settling for Harming the Children.	4-4
The 98% Solution: Maternal Instinct	4-6
Effective Screen for Domestic Violence	4-7
Avoid Discrediting Reports of DV Based on Non-Probative Information. . . .	4-8
Which Parent is Afraid of the Other.	4-8
What Is the Motive of the Alleged Abuser.	4-8
The Pattern of Abuse	4-9
Other Factors in Screening for DV	4-9
Context Is Critical To Understanding DV	4-11
Failure to Create Needed Reforms Based on Updated Research	4-12
Taking the Time to Protect Children	4-13
Separate Section for DV Custody Cases	4-13
Health and Safety of Children as First Priority	4-13
Mandate Evidence-Based Decisions by Considering the Research.	4-14
Multi-Disciplinary Approach	4-15
Need for Training and Retraining of Court Professionals	4-16
Recognizing Past Failures	4-17

Chapter 5: Protecting Children in Family Court: The Role of Child Protective Services

Veronica York

The Role of Child Protective Services in Child Custody Cases	5-2
When Child Protective Services Fails to Protect.	5-3

<i>Nicholson v. Williams: Protective Mothers Challenge the Practices of</i>	
New York’s Administration for Children’s Services	5-6
Trauma-Informed Care and Training for Social Workers	5-8
Coercive Tactics Used by Child Protective Services	5-11
The Greenbook Initiative	5-14
Child Welfare Systems and Child Sexual Abuse	5-17
The Good, The Bad, and the Possible Solution	5-19
An Alternative Legal Strategy: Don’t Negotiate—Challenge False Accusations	5-20
Conclusion	5-21

Chapter 6: Removing Bias from Alienation Theories

Barry Goldstein and Veronica York

Eight Examples of Gender Bias	6-2
Refusing to consent to forcing children to spend time with an alleged abuser	6-2
Keeping siblings apart	6-2
Telling the children to dress appropriately for the weather, eat healthy food, and avoid inappropriate television programs with adult oriented themes	6-2
Denying children privacy when they are undressed	6-2
Saying the father is abusive or his behavior is harmful	6-3
Putting so much pressure on a protective mother that she becomes ill	6-3
Reporting abuse and getting the children the needed medical and therapeutic treatment to help deal with their trauma	6-3
Withholding essential medical treatment and trauma therapy	6-3
Practices Needed to Take The Bias Out of Alienation	6-6
Consider the Behavior of <i>Both</i> Parents	6-6
Don’t Consider Alienation Until More Likely Causes for Bad Relationships Have Been Thoroughly Considered, Investigated, and Ruled Out	6-6
Be Aware of and Avoid Gender Bias	6-6
Employ Evidence-Based Approaches	6-7
The Wellbeing of Children Must Be the Priority	6-7
Context	6-8
Bias Isn’t Victimless—It Does Real Harm	6-8
Conclusion	6-9

Chapter 7: Faith-Based Survivor Advocacy: A Religious Response to Domestic Violence, Coercive Control, and Child Abuse

Debra Wingfield, Ed.D. and Dan Boeck, B.A.

The Historical Role of the Faith Community	7-2
How Faith Leaders Untrained in Abuse Dynamics Respond to Victims	7-5

Three Types of Religious Leaders 7-6
 Called to Peace Ministries: Advocates Create a Coordinated
 Community Response 7-7
 An Evolution 7-8
 The Advocacy Training Program. 7-10
 Coordinating the Response 7-10
 How Faith-Based Leaders Trained In Abuse Dynamics and
 Advocacy Respond to Victims 7-11
 The Role of Biblical Counseling in Responding to Abuse 7-14
 Best Practices for Churches and Religious Groups Seeking to
 Help Victims of Abuse 7-17
 Healing for Survivors Attending Advocacy Training Program (ATP) 7-20
 Healing for Survivors Accessing Advocacy 7-20
 Program Vision for the Future. 7-21
 How We Know This Is a Viable Model. 7-22

Appendix to Chapter 7: The House of Peace Advocacy Training Program

Debra Wingfield, Ed.D. and Dan Boeck, B.A.

Training Advocates to Serve Faith Communities for Family Court Cases 7a-1
 Three Fundamental Tenets of Advocacy 7a-1
 1. Education 7a-2
 2. Empowerment/Equipping. 7a-7
 3. Encouragement/Emotional Support 7a-10
 Mindfulness Tools 7a-13
 Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Applied To Advocacy 7a-15
 Healing for Survivors Attending the Advocacy Training Program. 7a-17
 Growth of the Advocacy Training Program (ATP) 7a-18
 Conclusion 7a-18

Chapter 8: Sportsworld

Rita Smith

The Sports World and Domestic Violence. 8-2
 Authorities’ Failure to Hold Athletes Accountable 8-2
 The Case that Grippped America: O.J. Simpson 8-3
 The Battle To Raise Awareness Begins 8-3
 The NFL Responds to Extensive Public Pressure. 8-4
 Applying the League’s Personal Conduct Policy 8-5
 The Women’s Summit and Unsung Heroes Events 8-6
 Other Professional Leagues Follow the NFL 8-7
 Major League Baseball. 8-7
 The National Basketball Association 8-8
 Major League Soccer 8-8
 Expanding the Impact of Sports to End Violence Against Women. 8-9

Chapter 9: Domestic Violence in the News: Common Coverage Mistakes and the Path Away from Superficial Reporting

Jessica Klein

Introduction	9-2
Language Carries Consequences	9-4
The Power of the Passive Voice	9-4
Don't Blame the Victim	9-6
Choking Isn't Strangling	9-7
Problematic Visuals	9-7
The Myth of "Both Side-ism"	9-8
Protecting Anonymous Survivors	9-8
When One Side Is Wrong	9-8
Newsworthiness Means "Splashy," Not Important	9-12
Newsrooms (and the Public) Love Celebrities	9-12
"Girls Next Door" Make the News	9-13
Why the Dearth of DV Coverage?	9-14
Arrest Reports Hide the Bigger Picture	9-14
The Vicious Cycle of Inadequate Statistics	9-15
Not Enough Money for DV	9-16
A Brief History of Sexism in Journalism	9-18
Recent Improvements	9-20
The Boston Globe: "State Fumbled for Answers While Girl Was in Limbo," 2016	9-21
100 Reporters: "Custody in Crisis: How Family Courts Nationwide Put Children in Danger," 2016	9-22
ProPublica: "Parental Alienation: A Disputed Theory with Big Implications," 2023	9-22
Washington Post: "Stress Is Weathering Our Bodies from the Inside Out," 2023	9-23
UNICEF and UN Women: "Evidence Review: Mapping the Nexus Between Media Reporting of Violence Against Girls," 2022	9-23
How Journalists Can Reduce DV	9-24
Making DV/CA a Beat	9-24
Alternative Funding	9-25
Training Prevents Bad Coverage	9-26
Conclusion	9-26

Chapter 10: Women Suffer Injustice In Family Court Because The Constitution Allows It. Why Aren't Women Talking About This?

Wendy J. Murphy, JD

Introduction	10-1
What Does Unequal Justice Look Like?	10-2

How Would Equality Help Women in Legal Proceedings?	10-5
How Can Women Challenge Biased Family Court Decisions	10-7
Why Is It Important To Tie Injustice to Inequality?	10-9
What Happened With the ERA?	10-10
Where Do Women Go From Here?	10-11

Chapter 11: Father’s Rights or Abuser’s Rights?

Veronica York

Fathers Have Historically Been “Masters” of the Household	11-2
A Movement Founded on Patriarchy, Control, and Violence	11-3
The Case for Father’s Rights	11-4
Prioritizing the Best Interests of the Child	11-5
Courts Must Demand Accountability and Change—Real Change—From Abusers	11-5
The Bias in Father’s Rights Is Hiding in Plain Sight	11-6
Father’s Roles vs. Father’s Rights	11-8
Are Two Parents Always Better Than One?	11-8
A Paradigm That Invites Abuse	11-9
Can Men Be Victims of DV?	11-10
Equality or Control?	11-11
Father’s Rights Over Children’s Safety	11-11
Bad Court Decisions Have Consequences	11-12
Language Mirrors Embedded Bias	11-13
Father’s Rights, A Christian Perspective	11-14
Conclusion	11-15

Chapter 12: Going Beyond the Vital Signs to Ask the Vital Questions

Karli Okeson, DO, FAAP

Addressing the Needs of Victims of Abuse	12-1
Screening	12-2
Bridging the Conversation	12-3
Recognizing and Responding to Evidence of Abuse	12-3
Intimate Partner Violence	12-3
Child Abuse	12-5
Physical Abuse	12-6
Sexual Abuse	12-7
Emotional Abuse	12-8
Neglect	12-8
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	12-9
Adolescent Encounters	12-11
Advocacy	12-13

Chapter 13: Saving Lives: Giving Children a Voice In Custody Outcomes

Dr. Ricky Greenwald & Dr. Genevieve Brackins

Introduction	13-1
About this Chapter	13-3
Part I: Intensive Child Therapy To Prevent Further Abuse Victimization:	
A Case Study	13-3
Case Study	13-6
Background	13-6
The Treatment	13-7
Post-Treatment Report	13-10
Discussion	13-10
Conclusion	13-11
Part II: U.S. Family Courts, Warning: May Cause Death	13-11
What the Public Doesn't Know or Understand About	
Child Custody Cases	13-12
Courts That Knowingly Send Children to Abusers	13-13
Richard Gardner and the Tragedy of Parental Alienation Theories	13-15

Chapter 14: “Mistakes” Are Made: The Problems with Custody Evaluators

Dr. Mo Therese Hannah

Ambushed in Court	14-2
Courts are Giving Credence Where It Isn't Warranted	14-4
The Problem With “Mental Health” Based Evaluations:	
When You Are a Hammer, Everything Looks Like a Nail	14-6
Is She Crazy? Or Is She Being Driven Crazy?	14-10
How the Courts Create New Victims: The Case of Clarissa	14-13
Child Custody Evaluators Believe in Fairy Tales: Alienation Theories	14-15
The Meier Study: Fallacious Alienation Claims Override Valid	
Allegations of Abuse	14-18
The Saunders Study: When It Comes to DV, Evaluators Don't Know	
What They're Doing	14-20
“Mistakes” Are Made	14-21
The Aftermath	14-22
The Battered Mothers Custody Conference	14-24
The New York State Blue Ribbon Commission on Forensic	
Custody Evaluations	14-25
My Chance to Testify	14-27
Listening to the Voices of Survivors	14-27
It's Still Going On	14-28

Chapter 15: Creating Custody Courts that Protect Children*Barry Goldstein*

What Is Needed to Make the Wellbeing of Children the Highest Priority?	15-3
Make the Health and Safety of Children the First Priority	15-3
Treat Domestic Violence Differently from Safe Cases	15-4
End the Poison from Biased and Unscientific	
Alienation Theories	15-4
Require Evidence-Based Approach	15-5
Respond Effectively to Economic Abuse	15-6
Rely on Volunteer Judges	15-6
Prevent Gender Bias	15-7
Ban Shared Parenting in DV Cases	15-7
Stop High Conflict Approaches in DV Custody Cases	15-8
Multi-Disciplinary Approach	15-8
Calculate ACE Score and Consider Risk Assessment	15-9
Early Hearing about Domestic Violence and Child Abuse	15-9
Reform Child Sexual Abuse Practices	15-9
Stop Using Harmful Shortcuts	15-10
Investigate DV and Child Abuse	15-10
End Outdated Practices	15-10
Require Accountability from Abusers	15-11
Reform Training for Judges and Other Professionals	15-11
Enforce Professional Ethics	15-11
Review Murders Related to Child Custody	15-12
How The Dream of Safe Courts Could Be Realized	15-12
Courts Can Implement Needed Reforms	15-13
Legislatures Can Require Needed Reforms	15-14
A Major Media Outlet Could Expose the Custody	
Court Scandal	15-15
The Cancer Society and Heart Association Could	
Take the Lead	15-15
A President Could Lead Us	15-15

Chapter 16: What Would An All-Out Offensive Against Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Look Like? It Might Be Modeled on the Victory Over Cigarette Smoking.*Barry Goldstein*

History of Connections Between Smoking and Health	16-2
The Ongoing Campaign To Prevent Smoking	16-4
The Role of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention In	
Stopping Smoking	16-7

Going All-In To End Domestic Abuse.16-9

Measuring the Financial and Other Harms From Domestic
Violence and Child Abuse.16-9

The Public Health Response: How the Social Change Around Smoking
Can Be Replicated for DV and Child Abuse16-11

Levers for Cultural Change: Entertainment and Sports16-14

A Role for Religious Communities16-15

Keeping Law Enforcement Focused On the Problem.16-16

Courts Need To Get Up To Date On What Scientific Research Is
Telling Us About Domestic Violence and Abusers.16-17

Social Service Agencies Need To Step Up To The Problem, Too, With Adequate
Staffing, Training, and a Commitment To Evidence-Based Practices16-20

A Media Lens That Reflects, Not Distorts, The Facts16-20

Using The ACE Research To Protect Children In School.16-22

All Hands On Deck16-22

Index I-1

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In her chapter, “‘Mistakes’ Are Made,” Dr. Maureen Hannah describes the origins of the annual Battered Mothers Custody Conference, which she co-founded with Liliane Miller, where protective mothers come together with domestic violence experts to learn from and share one another’s life experiences and lessons. They learn that other mothers who were similarly mistreated by the broken courts are strong, intelligent, caring, and easy to admire. We have learned so much from these women, particularly their courage. Barry wanted to call his first book “The Courage of Fear,” because protective mothers didn’t volunteer for dangerous duty, but rather were forced to display

courage to try to protect themselves and their children. It is agonizing that the courts are so often on the other side. We cannot do this awful work without getting to know mothers who have suffered the worst possible tragedy. When courts sent their children to be murdered by abusive fathers, it would be easy to understand if they spent their lives crying, withdrawing, or screaming into the night. Instead, they found the grace and courage to speak out on behalf of their dead children to try to prevent additional tragedies. They have often faced additional pain and even personal attacks trying to advance their most noble cause. This book is inspired by the love the mothers have for their children, a love that is never ending whether the child is dead or alive and a love the courts often misunderstand as alienation.

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—B.G., M.H., V.Y.

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—Barry Goldstein

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—Mo Therese Hannah

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—Veronica York

Introduction

Many people complain about the economy. They work hard at a full-time job but can't afford a middle-class lifestyle. In many cases families with both parents working are worse off than their parents when only the father worked outside the home.¹ At the same time, our long progress in increasing life expectancy has slowed or stopped. There are many explanations offered for the disappointing results, and many of the responses have some validity. This book demonstrates that simply using best practices to make domestic violence (DV) and child abuse less common would dramatically improve the economy and life expectancy for most Americans. The research is clear, but preventing DV is rarely on a list of effective solutions.

In June of 1961, the American Cancer Society and two other health organizations wrote a letter to President Kennedy telling him about their research connecting smoking and cancer. President Kennedy responded to their letter by asking his Surgeon General, Dr. Luther Terry, to create a committee to review the research and create the necessary response. The Surgeon General's Report in 1964 definitively confirmed that smoking causes cancer. Many parts of society came together to develop laws, practices, taxes, and education to discourage smoking. The response saved millions of lives and trillions of dollars.

The ACE (adverse childhood experiences) Studies are peer-reviewed medical research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ACE is often compared to the Surgeon General's Report because it offers similar opportunities. ACE found that children exposed to DV, child abuse, and other ACEs will live shorter lives with more health and social problems. Fundamentally, ACE tells us that the harm from DV and child abuse is far greater and longer-lasting than previously understood. This means preventing DV and child abuse deserves a far higher priority.

DV is one of the most underreported crimes, and as a result, the frequency of DV and its costs have long been understated. Until fairly recently, governmental and academic studies estimated the health costs from DV at \$5-8 billion.² These studies only considered the treatment of physical injuries, but the ACE research tells us that the fear and stress from DV causes a lifetime of health consequences that earlier studies failed to consider. In 2009, a study from the Academy of Violence and Abuse estimated the health costs from DV as \$750 billion.³ Previous studies accounted for less than one percent of the true harm caused by DV.

The authors of this book include research relied on by the CDC that found DV costs the United States \$3.6 trillion annually, including \$2.1 trillion in health costs.⁴

¹ Jessica Guynn, "Cost of Living is Up. Paychecks are Not. And Workers are Not OK." *USA Today*. January 27, 2026 available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2026/01/25/paychecks-not-keeping-up-with-cost-of-living/88306961007/>

² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2003). Available at https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/6543/cdc_6543_DS1.pdf

³ Theresa Dolezal, David McCollum & Michael Callahan. The Economic Costs of Violence and Abuse. Academy on Violence and Abuse (2009). Available at <http://www.ccasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Economic-Cost-of-VAW.pdf>

⁴ Peterson C, Kearns MC, McIntosh WL, Estefan LF, Nicolaidis C, McCollister KE, Gordon A, Florence C. Lifetime Economic Burden of Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Adults. *Am J Prev Med*. 2018 Oct;55(4):433-444. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2018.04.049.

In addition to direct health costs, other costs include the failure of survivors to reach their full economic potential, educational underachievement, and higher rates of crime. These losses create a severe brake on our economy. The authors of the study recognized that even these painful costs are understated because they miss some of the hard-to-measure psychological harm to children.

Spreading these enormous costs to every man, woman, and child in the United States comes to \$11,000 per person annually. If people had to write a check for tolerating DV, our response would have been drastically changed decades ago. Instead, we pay the cost in health and other insurance; taxes; crime; and a huge drag on the economy because so many adult victims, children, and third parties fail to reach their economic potential. Even a fraction of these potential savings would make a huge difference in the lives of people living paycheck to paycheck.

DV and child abuse can be dramatically reduced even if, like smoking, they can never be completely eradicated. The financial savings from a significant reduction in DV and child abuse would make a substantial improvement in the lives of low- and middle-class families in addition to families that would otherwise directly suffer from abuse. Advocates for DV and child abuse victims have quite reasonably focused on the moral and human benefits of preventing abuse but perhaps the economic benefits will prove more effective with policy makers.

We can be confident of our ability to dramatically reduce DV and child abuse because many communities have created responses based on holding abusers accountable that resulted in significant reductions in DV crime, especially homicides. Furthermore, reducing DV will reduce child abuse, because a large percentage of DV abusers also hurt their children, and child abuse increases DV because children exposed to DV are more likely to grow up and commit crimes, including DV. Just as a coordinated community response was used to discourage smoking, it has also been shown to be a key component in reducing DV.

HOW TO PREVENT DV AND CHILD ABUSE: HOLD ABUSERS ACCOUNTABLE

The first and most important step in preventing domestic violence and child abuse is to recognize abuse for what it is, and to hold abusers accountable for their actions and the consequences. As Barry Goldstein observes in Chapter 1, the failure to hold abusers accountable often begins when police are called to the scene. Officers untrained in the dynamics of abuse are very likely to miss signs of abuse, take the word of the abuser rather than of his victim, fail to make an arrest or gather the evidence needed to win convictions, and leave matters in a dangerous state of irresolution. Worse, there is ample data to suggest that police officers are frequently themselves abusers, and that their departments and fellow officers will protect them. While some departments fail to take DV seriously, other communities like Quincy, Massachusetts, Nashville, San Diego, and High Point, North Carolina have developed successful responses to DV that dramatically reduce DV crime and especially homicides. The successful practices rely on evidence-based research that includes strict enforcement of criminal laws, restraining orders, and probation rules; a coordinated community response; assistance for victims; and publicity that warns abusers that DV crimes will now have serious consequences.

Chapter 2, contributed by Elizabeth Liu, discusses the role of lawyers in representing protective mothers before family courts that are ill-informed about or hostile

to claims of DV in contested custody cases. The author emphasizes the importance of attorneys using a client-centered approach that gives mothers a significant role in making decisions about their cases, and in being trauma-informed—sensitive to the harm done to survivors by chronic exposure to coercive control and physical abuse. Too many attorneys are unwilling to actively advocate for DV victims. They may be afraid to present evidence of DV or the research that supports survivors. Some attorneys believe judges don't want to hear this information and instead pressure their clients to accept dangerous settlements. DV attorneys need to help courts avoid false or counter-intuitive assumptions that lead to denying and minimizing the harm caused by abusers. Lawyers need to use the research to help courts recognize the health and safety risks to survivors and the children.

Nobody is more responsible for raising attention and promoting research about gender bias than Lynn Hecht Schafran, the author of Chapter 3, "How Refusing to Believe Women Can Undermine Their Children's Health for Life or Kill Them." She helped convince courts in 41 states to sponsor committees to investigate gender bias in their work. The research confirmed that women professionals were taken less seriously, harassed, and worse. The largest part of the problem is that women litigants are given less credibility, held to a higher standard of proof, and blamed for the actions of their abusers. Courts have made some progress through their investigations of gender bias, but women litigants continue to be at a disadvantage, particularly in child custody cases. The tendency of courts to make rulings founded on ideological and subjective opinions instead of relying on facts and objective scientific research perpetuates the harms caused by gender bias.

SHORTCUTS THAT DO REAL HARM

In Chapter 4, Barry Goldstein exposes shortcuts custody courts take in the name of efficiency, but which do real harm to children. Courts are under pressure to manage crowded calendars, but many of the time-saving measures courts have adopted short-circuit the full investigations necessary to gain an adequate understanding of what is happening in a contested custody dispute. In DV custody cases, these shortcuts almost always work to the benefit of abusive fathers at the expense of children and their protective mothers. Context is important in understanding DV, but providing context means presenting important research like ACE and Saunders, and judges impatient to keep the process moving resist the introduction of research they deem irrelevant to the facts before them. Abusers are happy with the outdated practices courts are used to that help fathers take custody from good mothers. Other common examples of shortcuts that help abusers include limiting evidence to recent DV, physical abuse, or direct abuse of children; focusing only on public behavior; assuming the goal is shared parenting; high conflict approaches; and failure to hear from DV experts. Courts believe the limitations are fair because they apply to both parents, but the effects further tilt outcomes in favor of abusers.

Veronica York discusses the role of child protective agencies in Chapter 5. Shortcuts play a role here, too. The heavy caseloads most child protective services workers shoulder make it very difficult to devote the time needed to thoroughly and confidentially investigate abuse. Caseworkers are supposed to receive training about DV and child abuse but are seldom trained in or required to use a trauma-informed approach sensitive to evidence of coercion and abuse. As in custody courts, child protective

services proceed on the assumption that two parents are always better than one, and that it is more important to keep fathers, even abusive ones, in children's lives. Veronica also reports on a promising new approach called "The Greenbook Initiative," is a compendium of best practices that fosters multi-disciplinary cooperation between DV agencies and organizations charged with protecting children.

In Chapter 6, "Removing Bias from Alienation Theories," Barry Goldstein and Veronica York argue that "alienation" frameworks used in custody litigation—ranging from Parental Alienation Syndrome to "gatekeeping"—lack scientific support and operate as gender-biased tools that frequently assist abusive fathers. Drawing on practice experience and research syntheses (including ACE and the Saunders Study), this chapter shows how ordinary protective parenting is routinely mischaracterized as alienation while fathers' coercive control, litigation abuse, intimidation, and interference with children's medical and mental health care are minimized or ignored. The authors propose reforms to remove bias: evaluate both parents' conduct, investigate abuse and trauma as primary explanations for child resistance, require evidence rather than assumptions, and adopt trauma-informed, DV-informed decision-making that prioritizes children's safety and attachment to the non-abusive parent.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RESPONSES

One of the most pernicious harms of domestic violence is how abusers isolate their victims from family, friends, and neighbors, and one of the most effective strategies for combating DV is to reverse this isolation through a community-coordinated response—advocacy networks, shelters, social services, and law enforcement working together to provide resources for recovery and healing. Too often, however, one vital ingredient is missing from community-based services for DV survivors: religious communities ought to play a major role, but don't. As Debra Wingfield and Dan Boeck discuss in Chapter 7, "Faith-Based Survivor Advocacy," many religious communities are strongly patriarchal, place the father at the head of the family, and value saving marriages more than protecting endangered mothers and children. Many faith communities have even tolerated and covered up sexual abuse of children. In response to the DV movement some clergy and religious institutions have sought to support DV victims. When clergy are educated about DV and sincere in their desire to protect the most vulnerable members of their flock, they can be a powerful force for good. Starting as an informal, grass-roots effort to support abuse survivors navigating the complexity of family court, "Called to Peace Ministries" has evolved to provide a Coordinated Community Response, including highly trained advocates, for survivors seeking support that is both evidence-based and faith-based. In a special Appendix to their chapter, "The House of Peace Advocacy Training Program," Debra and Dan outline "three fundamental tenets of advocacy" and explain how they train advocates to guide protective mothers through a family court system that can seem arbitrary, intimidating, and hostile.

Whether you believe it's a good thing or not, sports play as great or greater role in the everyday life of America than does religion, and athletes are our most visible role models. Like religion, however, sports has a decidedly mixed record when it comes to responding to DV. Athletes are groomed by a culture of competition that can easily veer into violence, and sports teams, leagues, and media are far too apt to ignore or make excuses for serious misconduct when the abuser is a fan favorite. Rita Smith

took on the NFL over its record of looking the other way when its star athletes were charged with abuse, and ended up being hired by NFL's commissioner to turn around the attitude of players, coaches, fans, and the companies whose advertising makes it all run. In Chapter 8, "SportsWorld," Smith reviews the long history of athletes receiving special privileges and treatment, and of colleges, professional sports, and even law enforcement protecting sports heroes who committed DV or other abuses. The O.J. Simpson murder case and later the arrest of Ray Rice and other NFL players brought attention to the problem and put pressure on sports leagues to create a meaningful response. The leagues now have greater latitude to investigate DV even without an arrest or conviction. Leagues now provide training to athletes and employees about avoiding DV and sexual assault. The penalties for this abusive behavior are now more severe. Pro leagues are also helping to fund organizations that work to prevent DV and sexual abuse, but sport leagues could do more by working together to make their voices more powerful and consistent, and athletes could use their celebrity and social media to promote messages against violence.

The media often lets us down, too. DV advocates depend on legacy and new media to educate the public about domestic violence, but gender bias—unintentional yet firmly entrenched—garbles or confuses the message. In Chapter 9, "Domestic Violence in the News: Common Coverage Mistakes and the Path Away from Superficial Reporting," journalist Jessica Klein takes her profession to task for under-reporting DV and child abuse, and for falling back on clichés and passive-voice narratives that frequently erase offenders from the story. Journalists often use victim-blaming approaches and seek to tell "both sides of the story," as if there were any justification for DV or child abuse. The news isn't all bad: Klein reports on recent improvements by investigative journalists telling important stories with care and nuance. Some grants and non-profit newsrooms have been helpful in providing more of the needed coverage and should be expanded. As the scientific research that supports victims' concerns gains wider currency, journalists are more likely to provide fact-based coverage. Klein advocates for newsrooms to establish a regular beat to cover abuse instead sending ambulance chasers after the most gruesome stories. DV and child abuse are specialized areas of knowledge and reporters need training to do a better job covering these issues.

ADDRESSING THE STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO JUST OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN

Chapter 10, "Women Suffer Injustice In Family Court Because The Constitution Allows It. Why Aren't Women Talking About This?" by nationally known legal scholar Wendy Murphy, addresses the structural inequity at the heart of the American justice system: the historic, pervasive, and deeply rooted legal bias against women that the Equal Rights Amendment was conceived to address. The amendment was ratified by Virginia, the 38th state to do so, in 2020, but because the Congressionally mandated time limit had passed, the ERA is not yet recognized as part of the Constitution. Women have achieved an unprecedented level of parity with men, so many believe the ERA no longer matters. As Murphy shows, this assumption is dangerously wrong. Without the ERA, there is nothing in the Constitution to force courts to respect women's rights. Courts and other governmental agencies treat women unfairly because they can. The challenges women face when seeking justice over workplace harassment, unequal pay, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and other forms of economic and legal mistreatment continue

because women lack the legal protection of equal standing before the court. The widespread failure of custody courts to treat protective mothers fairly is similarly permitted. Professor Murphy urges women litigants to recognize and raise the issue of discrimination and to bring motions and lawsuits based on this unequal treatment—and to continue fighting for the eventual passage of the ERA.

In Chapter 11, Veronica York examines the harm caused by the “Fathers’ Rights” Movement. Throughout history, in most cultures, it is men who preside over and control the family. Over the last one hundred years, especially in the United States and Western Europe, a series of liberation movements, including temperance and suffrage crusades and organizations devoted to employment and educational equality, have fought to win equal treatment for women. These efforts have made women less unequal, although there is still a long way to go. But even this limited progress has been too much for the men who champion “Fathers’ Rights.” A key strategy of this sinister movement is using family courts to regain what they see as their “right” to control their wives and children. They have developed tactics like Parental Alienation Syndrome, shared parenting, and high conflict approaches to create a false narrative that children are always better off with two parents, even if one is an abuser. These tactics have been catastrophically successful in convincing judges to allow abusers back into the lives of survivors who have tried to escape to safety. The “father’s rights” abusers demand are really rights to continue the violence and coercive control they believe is their natural prerogative as men. The murders and other preventable deaths of innocent children that result have so far failed to fully rouse the conscience of the courts to reform their biased practices.

RESPONSE FROM THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY

Family physicians and pediatricians are at the front lines in the effort to stop DV. When a mother and her child present with evidence of abuse, health providers can, as pediatrician Karli Okeson urges in Chapter 12, “go beyond the vital signs to ask the vital questions” that can mean the difference between safety and danger, life and death. As “mandated reporters” physicians have a legal duty to bring clear cases of abuse to the attention of the relevant legal authorities. More importantly, however, physicians can and must address the needs of victims, by careful, trauma-informed screening, coordinating appropriate follow up care, and “bridging the conversation”—creating a safe space for victims that cultivates healing. Providing compassionate, supportive, and patient-focused care in the medical setting can contribute to better outcomes for patients by making them feel safe, validated, and secure.

Abused children are often unable to tell caseworkers or court professionals about the abuse they suffered, because of fear or threats from the abuser. Court professionals usually lack the techniques or interest in creating an atmosphere where children feel comfortable describing their experiences. Yet without such testimony, it is almost impossible to persuade family court judges that abuse has occurred and that the abuser is unfit to parent. In Chapter 13, “Saving Lives: Giving Children a Voice In Custody Outcomes,” Dr. Greenwald describes an intense therapy approach, using a technique called “Progressive Counting” over a four-day period, that helped the child describe her father’s abuse to the caseworker and GAL. Dr. Greenwald has successfully applied this method in cases where children have suffered or witnessed abuse but have been unable to verbalize their experience in a way that would satisfy the courts. In the second half of

this chapter, Dr. Genevieve Brackins examines the frequent failures of custody courts to protect children, underscoring the necessity of approaches like her co-author's.

Among the weakest links in the family courts are “custody evaluators”—usually psychologists, evaluators interview family members and other witnesses, and make formal recommendations to the court about child custody arrangements. Judges, who are trained in the law and not in mental health, tend to defer to evaluators in deciding questions of custody, visitation, and shared parenting. As Dr. Mo Therese Hannah explains in Chapter 14, “‘Mistakes’ Are Made: The Problems with Custody Evaluators,” ceding so much responsibility to evaluators who lack the training and knowledge to make these kinds of determinations leads to unjust and often tragic outcomes, especially in contested custody cases where domestic violence is present. The author, a psychologist and DV survivor, recounts entering family court with documented abuse findings and an expectation of protection, only to discover a system that routinely ignores allegations of abuse or, worse, turns them into narratives of maternal pathology. Central to the chapter is the evaluator's outsized reliance on psychological instruments (notably the MMPI) that do not validly assess parenting capacity or predict child safety outcomes. Dr. Hannah's ordeal, frustrating and painful as it was, came to a better conclusion than many protective mothers endure. Her experience inspired her to found a conference series, *The Battered Mothers' Custody Conferences*, that has served as an influential forum for protective mothers and DV experts to share research findings, strategies, and ideas for reforming a dysfunctional court system.

Chapter 15, “Creating Custody Courts that Protect Children” by Barry Goldstein discusses how courts can better protect children. Custody courts developed practices to respond to DV at a time when almost no research was available. It is not surprising that many initial assumptions turned out to be wrong. What is disappointing is that inertia and defensiveness have prevented needed reforms now that there is research that confirms the present practices are harming children. With rare exceptions, courts have been slow to integrate ACE and Saunders that go to the essence of the wellbeing of children while allowing itself to be influenced by unscientific alienation theories, twice rejected by the American Psychiatric Association for lack of valid research. These theories are deliberately biased to help abusive fathers take custody from good mothers. Even worse, custody courts do not understand the essential nature of DV custody cases and continue to use the same practices as relied on for two safe parents. Abusive fathers have developed tactics to manipulate custody courts to regain control over their victims and punish them for trying to leave. This has made it almost impossible for mothers with children to escape DV abusers. As a result, two decades of progress in reducing DV homicides has been stopped and fully reversed. DV homicides of women went from 1,600 in 1978 to 1,181 in 2005 and back to 1,690 in 2021. The increase occurred while other types of murder have reached record lows. Over 1,000 children involved in DV custody cases have been murdered in the last 16 years, mostly by abusive fathers. Custody courts have allowed themselves to become a huge obstacle to the work to prevent DV.

When President Kennedy asked his Surgeon General to create a committee to study the connection between smoking and cancer, the ensuing studies confirmed the lethal effects of cigarette smoking, and the Surgeon General, public health officials, and trial lawyers mounted an all-out offensive against smoking. The benefits to society have been of enormous import: millions of lives have been saved, and immeasurable suffering prevented. Today we are presented with a similar opportunity to reduce suffering and save lives. The “ACE” (Adverse Childhood Experiences) research has confirmed the same profound lethality of domestic violence and related exposure to trauma that

a prior generation discovered about smoking. In the book's concluding chapter, "What Would An All-Out Offensive Against Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Look Like? It Might Be Modeled on the Victory Over Cigarette Smoking," Barry Goldstein narrates the decades-long history of public health efforts to discourage cigarette smoking. Given the 73% drop in adult cigarette smoking that took place between the 1960s and the year 2022, it is clear that this campaign, whose methods included media messaging, medical advice, school curricula, and legislation, was one of the most successful public health efforts in history. He recommends that the same approaches that were successfully used to discourage cigarette smoking be utilized by the movement to eliminate domestic violence and child abuse. Just as smoking was shown to cause cancer and heart disease, the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and deleterious health outcomes later in life offers a compelling argument to consider DV and CA as equally toxic to human health and well-being as smoking has been proven to be.

CONCLUSION

When the American Cancer Society discovered research linking smoking and lung cancer, they must have been saddened by the enormous harm cigarettes were causing and yet excited about the benefits the research could bring. The editors of this book are excited that the research cited by the authors of the chapters in this book confirm what we expected. ACE can be used like the Surgeon General's Report six decades ago to dramatically reduce cancer and heart disease and so many other health and social problems.

In 1964, 200 reporters showed up for the press conference announcing the Surgeon General's findings. There was much excitement at the prospect of saving lives by discouraging smoking. Reporters also covered the potential financial harm because tobacco was such a large industry. It turned out the financial savings from preventing cancer and heart disease were far greater than the economic value of the tobacco industry.

Smokers' "rights" groups, often financed by the tobacco industry, created another obstacle to reducing cancer and heart disease by discouraging smoking. Smokers did not suffer any disadvantages beyond the effects of smoking but somehow argued for their right to harm the health of others. As a society, we did not allow these "rights" to interfere with the enormous benefits from reducing smoking.

For five decades, the primary focus on DV has been the human harm caused by DV and child abuse and human benefits from preventing that abuse. Sadly, the potential human benefits have not been enough to convince society to take the actions necessary to prevent DV as we took to prevent smoking. It is hard to grasp or fully calculate the financial benefits from allowing people who would otherwise be harmed by smoking or DV to reach their full potential. There are so many variables that any calculation or estimate is likely to understate the benefit from prevention. Dr. Vincent Felitti, lead author of the original ACE Study believes prevention is the best use of his research, particularly in the family courts.

The latest research demonstrates our tolerance for DV is costing the United States at least \$3.6 trillion dollars annually. This doesn't include the financial cost of sexual assault, harassment, discrimination, and the many ways women are mistreated because of their gender. There are similarly large financial losses from our continued tolerance and even encouragement of racism, heterosexism, classism, and attacks on immigrants.

Ironically, people who scapegoat and blame others for their economic hardship are undermining the economy and thus themselves. Just as everyone personally benefitted financially from preventing smoking, everyone would enjoy significant financial benefits from reducing DV and child abuse.

When the link between smoking and cancer was exposed, the tobacco lobby was the largest obstacle to the enormous benefits from discouraging smoking. We now know the tobacco companies lied to the public and minimized the harm they were causing. They engaged in aggressive litigation tactics and propaganda to hold on to their deadly business as long as possible. Particularly reprehensible was their work to lure children into the dangerous habit of smoking.

The benefits of avoiding smoking were so great that we overcame the obstacles created by the tobacco industry. The frequency of smoking went from 42.4% of the public in 1965 to 11.5% in 2021. Nearly half of all living adults who ever smoked have quit. The work to prevent smoking has saved more than 8 million lives in the United States.

Today, the largest obstacles to preventing DV include male supremacist (“fathers’ rights”) groups, the cottage industry that helps abusers in family courts, and the custody court system. Male supremacist groups and the cottage industry do their harm for ideological and financial reasons. They engage in lies and minimization like the tobacco companies. Men have a long history of power and privilege over women and their fight is not for equal rights but to maintain their unfair advantages. Even worse than smokers, abusers deliberately seek to harm their victims. We should be able to overcome the cottage industry as it has a small fraction of the wealth and power the tobacco industry had.

In fairness, no judge wants to hurt children. The problem is that the custody courts initially developed practices to respond to DV at a time when no research was available. Once the research demonstrated the old practices were harming children, the courts ought to have engaged in an end-to-end reevaluation of their assumptions and practices. Instead, inertia and defensiveness have prevented the courts from making the necessary reforms that would protect children from abusers. We hope the conclusive research about the harm of the present practices to children, the link to cancer and heart disease, and the enormous harm to society (including increased DV homicides and mass shootings) will convince courts to create the needed reforms.

If the courts are unwilling to fix their flawed response to DV, it will be up to legislatures to force courts to protect children and stop tolerating DV. The rise in DV homicides that can be directly traced back to ill-considered and uninformed custody court rulings, and the enormous economic harm that is an unavoidable consequence of the trauma inflicted by abusers, should give legislatures a strong incentive to pass laws like the Safe Child Act that require courts to use the best tools available, like the ACE and Saunders findings, and make the health and safety of children, not “efficiency” in managing their dockets, the highest priority.

Several of the chapters in this book include citations to a study from the Center for Judicial Excellence (CJE). The center has kept a record of the number of children involved in contested custody cases who were murdered. Some chapter authors cite the most recent CJE count, that “989 children” have died since the Center began keeping records 16 years earlier; other chapters use the figure “over 1,000.” When the executive director of CJE took a leave of absence in 2025, the count stopped. The actual number is now, regrettably, well over 1,000.

The fundamental premise of this book is that we can create a coordinated community response to prevent DV as we did to prevent smoking. We have been pleased with the response we have received from the American Cancer Society and American

Heart Association in discussions about their role in preventing cancer and heart disease by discouraging DV and child abuse just as they did by discouraging smoking. Communities like religion, education, medical, law enforcement, mental health, legal, sports, and business can come together to use their influence for preventing DV and child abuse. We have focused on the American Cancer Society and American Heart Association because they are well respected and have a history of bringing a community response together for the good cause of preventing cancer and heart disease. It is time, indeed well past time, to wage the same health-enriching, life-saving effort against DV and child abuse.

About the Editors and Contributors

Barry Goldstein, J.D., is a nationally recognized domestic violence author, speaker and advocate. He is the author of *Scared to Leave Afraid to Stay*; co-editor with Dr. Mo Therese Hannah of the two-volume *Domestic Violence, Abuse and Child Custody: Legal Strategies and Policy Issues* (DVAC); and co-author with Elizabeth Liu of *Representing the Domestic Violence Survivor: Critical Legal Issues: Effective Safety Strategies*, now in its second edition. Barry is the author of *The Quincy Solution: Stop Domestic Violence and Save \$500 Billion* (2014). He served as an instructor in a NY Model Batterer Program for twenty-one years. Mr. Goldstein practiced law in New York for 30 years. He is co-chair of the Child Custody Task Group for the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS). He also serves as Consulting Expert for the Center for Judicial Excellence. Barry Goldstein is the author of the Safe Child Act which is a comprehensive proposal to make custody courts safe for children involved in domestic violence cases. Barry is a partner in Goldstein & York, DV Experts. He can be reached at Barryg78@aol.com.

Mo Therese Hannah, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist, author, and editor. She is a Professor of Psychology at Siena University in Loudonville, New York and has served for many years as the Editor of the CRI publication, *Family and Intimate Partner Violence Quarterly*. She co-founded and Chaired the Battered Mothers Custody Conference, an annual event bringing together domestic violence professionals, legal experts, and DV advocates with protective mothers from all over the country. The conference faculty consists of the nation's leading voices on the problems faced by battered women seeking custody of their children in the family court system. A therapist specializing in relationship dynamics, couples therapy, grief, and psychospiritual approaches, she has co-authored or co-edited eight books and numerous chapters and articles on related topics. She regularly serves as a Featured Presenter at the Forever Family Foundation grief retreats.

Veronica York is a dedicated domestic violence (DV) author, speaker, and advocate. She serves as an expert witness in DV cases, with a particular focus on child custody disputes involving allegations of domestic violence and child abuse. As a Certified High Conflict Divorce Coach and Family Law Mediator, Veronica provides guidance to protective mothers navigating complex custody battles. With firsthand experience as a protective mother, Veronica deeply understands the challenges posed by the family court system's harmful response to DV custody cases. She is passionate about advocating for systemic change, including improved training and education for court professionals on domestic violence and its impact. Her mission is to support a family court system that prioritizes the safety and well-being of survivors and their children.

Dan Boeck served in pastoral ministry for nearly thirty years before joining the Called to Peace Ministries, where he serves as Executive Director. Dan graduated from Moody Bible Institute and has done graduate work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Liberty University. Dan has been a keynote speaker, seminar presenter, and conference trainer in the US, India, UK, and Czech Republic. Dan and his wife, Shannon, recently co-authored the book *Domestic Abuse and the Dechurched*.

Genevieve Brackins, Ph.D., teaches *Values & Ethics* at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Prescott campus. Her body of research has been presented at Uppsala University's Centre for Gender Research in Sweden, the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Study, The Universities of Carthage and Southern Denmark and many other institutions. She is the founder of a wellness company providing energy management services including TSI Removal Energy Alchemy®, Reiki, Yoga, Nidra, Emotional Purges and additional wellness support services. Dr. Brackins believes every child is entitled to an abuse-free existence and is dedicated to this endeavor.

Ricky Greenwald, PsyD, is the founder and executive director of the Trauma Institute & Child Trauma Institute, and a fellow of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Greenwald is the author of numerous professional articles as well as several books, including *EMDR in Child & Adolescent Psychotherapy* (1999), *Child Trauma Handbook* (2005), *EMDR Within a Phase Model of Trauma-Informed Treatment* (2007), *Treating Problem Behaviors* (2009), and *Progressive Counting* (2013). His work has been translated into over a dozen languages. Dr. Greenwald is a pioneer and leading expert in EMDR, progressive counting, the flash technique, and intensive trauma-focused psychotherapy.

In her decade-long career as a freelance journalist, **Jessica Klein** has written about intimate partner and family violence, injustices and players in the cryptocurrency industry, curious subcultures, sex work, and a host of topics in between. As a contributing reporter at The Fuller Project, a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to journalism about women, she received the 2021 NAJA National Native Media Award for Best Coverage of Native America. In 2024, her profile of artist Muzae Sesay, "An Oakland Made of Legos," received a nomination for the National Arts & Entertainment Journalism Awards from the Los Angeles Press Club. She's contributed to and edited two books, "Abetting Batterers: What Police, Prosecutors, and Courts Aren't Doing to Protect America's Women" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and "Death Before Sentencing: Ending Rampant Suicide, Overdoses, Brutality, and Malpractice in America's Jails" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

Elizabeth Liu, J.D., was most recently the Managing Attorney at the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment & Appeals Project (DV LEAP) where she litigated domestic violence appellate cases and helped lead DV LEAP's various training, advocacy, public speaking, and outreach efforts. Prior to joining DV LEAP, Ms. Liu was a Women's Law and Public Policy Fellow at Georgetown University Law Center's Domestic Violence Clinic where she supervised law students litigating civil protection order cases and cotaught the clinic seminar. She previously worked as a staff attorney for NARAL Pro-Choice America. Ms. Liu has served as the president of the board of directors for the Asian Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project and is currently a member of their advisory board. She was also a member of the board of

directors of the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. She received her LL.M. in Advocacy from Georgetown University Law Center, her J.D. from Harvard Law School and her B.A., with honors, from the University of Chicago.

Wendy J. Murphy, JD, is adjunct professor of Sexual Violence and Law Reform at New England Law | Boston where she also co-directs the Women's and Children's Advocacy Project (WCAP) under the Center for Law and Social Responsibility. Wendy specializes in women's rights and has authored numerous scholarly articles including a landmark piece on the history of women's fight for the Equal Rights Amendment and a ground-breaking law review article explaining the legal relationship between sexual assault on campus and Title IX. She served as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Law School and has filed many impact litigation cases involving Title IX and campus sexual assault, beginning in the early 1990s, resulting in unprecedented victories against Harvard College, Harvard Law School, and Princeton University. She is the author of two books, *And Justice For Some*, published by Penguin/Sentinel in 2007 and *Oh No He Didn't: Brilliant Women and the Men Who Took Credit for Their Work*, published by Cynren Press in 2024.

Dr. Karli Okeson is a Pediatric Emergency Medicine Physician at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and an Assistant Professor at Emory University School of Medicine. She obtained her medical degree from Midwestern University and completed her pediatric residency and fellowship training at Emory University School of Medicine. As a passionate advocate for children, she has worked to protect and empower those who have experienced trauma and abuse. Her research and community outreach efforts focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), where she has conducted several studies in the pediatric emergency department to improve processes for those at risk. She enjoys lecturing on ACEs and Trauma-Informed Practices to raise awareness and foster healthier environments for children. To expand this work, she has started an initiative, MEDLAW Learning, to educate judges and legal professionals on medical topics that can affect their legal cases. She believes children have a valuable voice and should be heard in order to make effective change.

Lynn Hecht Schafran, Esq. is an internationally recognized attorney specializing in gender discrimination law and Director since 1981 of the National Judicial Education Program to Promote Equality for Women and Men in the Courts (NJEP), a project of Legal Momentum (formerly NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund) in cooperation with the National Association of Women Judges. A graduate of Smith College and the Columbia University School of Law, she was Law Clerk to Federal District Court Judge Edmund L. Palmieri in the Southern District of New York and a Litigation Associate with the New York-based law firm of Weil, Gotshal & Manges. The numerous courses Ms. Schafran presented at national, state and federal judicial colleges prompted state supreme courts and federal circuits to establish task forces on gender bias in the courts, to which she was an advisor. She is also widely published on gender bias in the courts, the law, and the legal profession. Ms. Schafran has received numerous awards in recognition of her work to eliminate bias in the courts, among them the first Distinguished Service Award of the National Association of Women Judges, the Smith College Medal, and the American Bar Association Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award.

Rita Smith was the Executive Director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence for nearly 22 years. She is currently a Senior Adviser for the National Football League on their efforts to end violence against women and Executive Vice President of External Relations for domesticshelters.org.

Debra Wingfield, Ed.D. has over 50 years training therapists and counseling children and adults who experienced child maltreatment and family violence, and now educates and trains professionals, community members, advocates, and therapists on coercive control, domestic and family violence, and the impacts of child maltreatment. She is the author of *From Darkness to Light: Your Inner Journey*, a workbook to help adults heal from child maltreatment and family violence; *Through a Child's Voice: Transformational Journaling* for tweens and up who have experienced child abuse and family violence; and *Eyes Wide Open: Help! with Control Freak Co-Parents, Second Edition* for Protective Parents to move their lives forward and stop being controlled by their abusive ex. Dr. Wingfield was a faculty member at Regis University, teaching psychology and counseling courses, and developed and taught a domestic violence counselor training curriculum at the University of Southern Colorado, now Colorado State University-Pueblo, from 1994 - 2001. She founded House of Peace Publications in 2009 to provide virtual training in Domestic Violence/Coercive Control for professionals with clients impacted by these issues.