

BUCKS COUNTY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY
REVIEW COMMISSION

FINAL REPORT
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MARCH 6, 2008



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DEDICATION

The members of the Commission wish to acknowledge the strength and courage demonstrated by each family member and friend of the murdered victims, Mary Claire Alessandroni, Susan Czarny, Suzanne Detwiler and Robin Shaffer.

Finally, the Commission is dedicating this report and its recommendations to the loving memories of Mary Claire Alessandroni, Susan Czarny, Suzanne Detwiler and Robin Shaffer.

INTRODUCTION

During a six month period (April 22, 2005 to October 7, 2005), there was a series of domestic abuse related homicides resulting in the deaths of twelve people in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

The sheer volume of deaths in such a short period, as well as the fact that they occurred in areas and among families that are not perceived as high risk by the general community, were catalysts for action. In response to the shock and concern felt by representatives of County systems and the public, in October 2005 the District Attorney convened the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission. The Commission chose to review four domestic abuse related cases that involved the deaths of eight people. All four cases were closed prior to the review. The Commission understood that they might not be able to draw any conclusions from these four homicides. However, it was the hope of the Commission that some common trends would emerge.

MISSION

The mission of the Bucks County Fatality Review Commission is to prevent deaths from intimate relationship violence by utilizing a systematic confidential, multi-agency review process, and to identify system gaps in order to expand effective violence prevention and coordination strategies. This multi-agency review shall make recommendations for systems change, in order to prevent future deaths from intimate relationship violence.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

The Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission consists of a locally based, multi-disciplinary panel of professionals to conduct the in-depth review of the domestic abuse fatalities. These professionals represented Bensalem Township Police Department, Bucks County Adult Probation and Parole, Bucks County Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, A Woman's Place, Network of Victim Assistance, Raven Hill Psychological Services, Pennridge Regional Police Department, Solebury Township Police Department, Quakertown Borough Police Department, Warminster Township Police Department, Bucks County District Attorney's Office, Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania Bucks Division, Bensalem Township Police Department's Domestic Violence Manager, and private attorneys.

REVIEW PROCESS

Over a period of a year and a half, the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission met monthly in order to review each of the four domestic abuse cases. The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission requested all records related to the individuals involved, including Protection From Abuse Orders, court records, law enforcement incident reports, and the homicide investigation. Each police department presented the information about the fatality that occurred in their jurisdiction, and any background information. The Commission invited identified surviving family members, friends and co-workers to provide any additional information. Commission members read the information provided from the various agencies and examined their own agency's records for contacts with the victim, the perpetrator, or the children.

In the Commission's search for knowledge and information regarding contact and services provided to victims and/or perpetrators, confidentiality constraints prevented some members and outside agencies from providing reports, records or contact information. While it did not prevent the review, it limited the information which might have been helpful in the outcome and recommendations of the Commission.

For the purposes of this review the Commission defines a domestic violence fatality as a death which arises from an abuser's efforts to seek power and control over their intimate partner. Using this definition, domestic violence fatalities include:

- a. All homicides in which the victim was the current or former intimate partner of the perpetrator;
- b. Homicides occurring as an extension of or in response to ongoing partner abuse;
- c. Suicides which occur in the context of intimate partner violence.

CASE STUDIES

The four cases that the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission chose to review are described below:

Case #1

Susan Czarny

April 22, 2005

Fifty year old Susan Czarny maintained a single family home in Solebury Township with her husband of approximately two years.

In February 2005, Susan Czarny contacted Solebury Township Police Department to report that her husband had attempted suicide. Jon Czarny was subsequently admitted, evaluated and treated for mental health issues. Approximately one month later, Solebury Township Police Department received information from concerned family members that Jon Czarny had been physically abusing Susan Czarny and forcing her to withdraw money from a bank account so he could purchase drugs. Even though Susan Czarny denied any abuse and requested that the family not get involved, these family members expressed fears to police that Jon Czarny might kill his wife or himself. The Bucks County Adult Probation and Parole Department was notified of this information since Jon Czarny was on probation for forgery and prescription fraud.

In April 2005, Jon Czarny was found dead of a probable drug overdose in his parked vehicle in a public parking lot. When police went to check on his wife, Susan Czarny, they discovered her body in the kitchen of their Solebury home with multiple stab wounds and serious head trauma. It was determined that Susan Czarny was murdered by her husband, Jon Czarny, after he repeatedly stabbed and cut her neck with a kitchen knife and hit her in the head with a rolling pin and a stool.

Case #2
Robin Shaffer
June 15, 2005

Robin Shaffer, a forty-three year old mother of two adult daughters, was married to Jeffery Ogle for two years. Ms. Shaffer was self-employed as a cleaning lady.

On May 6, 2005, Robin Shaffer made a report to Richland Township (Bucks County) Police Department that Jeffery Ogle was not taking medications for depression. She feared that he may harm himself or commit suicide. On May 21, 2005, Ms. Shaffer separated from Jeffery Ogle and leased an apartment in Quakertown Borough, Bucks County. Robin Shaffer expressed fear to family and friends regarding her estranged husband's increased obsessive thoughts and stalking behaviors after she began dating another man. On May 25, 2005, Jeffery Ogle went to the office of Robin Shaffer's apartment building under false pretenses to ask specific questions about his estranged wife's apartment. On June 13, 2005, Jeffery Ogle legally purchased a 9mm pistol in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Two days later, on June 15, 2005, Robin Shaffer was on the telephone with her boyfriend when he heard her scream and the phone went silent. Robin's boyfriend suspected that her estranged husband, Jeffery Ogle, was involved. Subsequently, the Bucks County Department of Communication (911) dispatched Quakertown Borough Police Officers to the apartment building for a well being check of Robin Shaffer. Quakertown Borough Police found Robin Shaffer in her living room with a serious gun shot wound. Robin Shaffer died a short time later. During the next several hours, Jeffrey Ogle made multiple telephone calls to family members indicating that he caused harm to Ms. Shaffer. At that time he expressed no remorse for his actions. Later that day, Jeffery Ogle was observed by officers hiding in a wooded area within Memorial park in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. When Jeffery Ogle was confronted by police, he took his own life with a gunshot to his head. Police later determined that Jeffrey Ogle murdered Robin Shaffer.

Case #3

Suzanne Detwiler

June 18, 2005

Suzanne Detwiler, 41 years old, was married to Andrew Detwiler, 44 years old. They had three children together. In the beginning of 2004, the Detwiler Family moved from Souderton Borough, Montgomery County to a single family home in Perkasie, Bucks County.

On June 12, 2005, while a Constable was serving Andrew Detwiler with a witness subpoena for an upcoming trial in Montgomery County, he found Andrew Detwiler attempting to commit suicide in the garage. During the subsequent police investigation into the suicide attempt, Suzanne advised police that she and her husband were going through a separation. Suzanne, as well as other family members, brought Andrew Detwiler to Grandview Hospital for mental health treatment. Andrew Detwiler signed a voluntary commitment for inpatient treatment with Penn Foundation. As reported by family members, after several days of treatment, Mr. Detwiler was able to sign himself out of facility and returned home. On June 18, 2005, Suzanne Detwiler planned to leave for the shore. Two of the children reported hearing their mother accuse their father of loosening the lug nuts on Suzanne's car prior to her trip to the shore. During the argument, Andrew Detwiler was seen holding a hunting knife against Suzanne's throat. As the altercation escalated, the two children took an unloaded shotgun into the kitchen. Mr. Detwiler wrestled the shotgun away and retrieved ammunition from the garage. While Andrew Detwiler was locked in the garage, Suzanne and one child hid in a closet. Suzanne called 911 for help. Andrew Detwiler then fired several rounds from the garage at the door leading into the kitchen. While Suzanne and one son attempted to run out of the house through the back door, the other son retrieved a second shotgun from the bedroom. While Suzanne attempted to escape, Andrew Detwiler fired one shot at Suzanne from inside the house. As a result, Suzanne was fatally wounded by a gun shot to her right shoulder. Their father was seen kneeling over their mother holding the shotgun, and one son fired a

shot with a second weapon at his father, striking him in the hip. Andrew Detwiler ran to the side yard with the shotgun. His son fired another round, striking his father in the lower back, which proved to be a fatal injury.

Case #4

Mary Claire Alessandroni

September 9, 2005

Mary Claire Alessandroni was a 43 year old hair dresser and mother of three children. Mary Claire and Joseph Alessandroni were married approximately ten years.

While there were no formal or informal reports of physical abuse, family and friends observed controlling, manipulative, obsessive, and stalking behaviors on the part of Joseph Alessandroni. For example, Joseph Alessandroni repeatedly drove to Mary Claire's place of employment and waited in the parking lot, stalking her, until her shift was completed.

In January 2005, Mary Claire and Joseph Alessandroni separated, and she moved into an apartment in Warminster, Bucks County. Custody of their young daughter was shared and Joseph Alessandroni provided some child support on a weekly basis. In July 2005, Mary Claire purchased a duplex in Hatboro, Montgomery County. Although Mary Claire started divorce proceedings during that year, there is no evidence that further action was taken. Mary Claire believed that Joseph Alessandroni was jealous of Mary Claire's new life since Joseph confronted her new neighbor early in September because he suspected the neighbor may be dating Mary Claire.

On September 9, 2005, Mary Claire went to her estranged husband's home in Warminster to pick up some outdoor furniture for a party she was hosting in her new home. While there, Joseph Alessandroni physically assaulted Mary Claire in the kitchen, causing blunt force to her head. He then moved Mary Claire to the bedroom. Mary Claire was then asphyxiated with a plastic bag. After the murder, Joseph cleaned up the kitchen, then left the scene of the murder and mailed letters to Mary Claire's family members. Joseph Alessandroni then returned to the home and fatally shot himself in the head. Police found Joseph Alessandroni's body lying next to Mary Claire.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FINDINGS

General Information

The victims and perpetrators in each case were Caucasian. All victims were female and all perpetrators were male. The victims ranged in age from 41 to 50 years of age, while the age of the perpetrators ranged from 44 to 48 years. In two of the four fatalities the perpetrators subsequently committed suicide. The third perpetrator died as a result of injuries sustained from another family member, and the fourth died of a drug overdose.

Relationship

In all of the relationships, the couples were legally married. The duration of marriage ranged from two to twenty years. In Case #2 and #4, the victims recently separated from the perpetrator. In Case #3, the victim lived apart from the perpetrator for six months but returned to the relationship. In that case, however, the Commission learned from a third party that the victim stated her intentions of leaving the marriage immediately prior to the homicide.

Relationship at Time of Death

Married living together	2
Married but separated	2

Children

Nine children are currently living without one or both parents due to these four domestic abuse related homicides.

Custody issues played no apparent role in any of the four domestic related homicides studied. While custody issues did not play a direct role in these

particular homicide cases, the Commission noted that children can be a convenient and legally condoned method for perpetrators of domestic abuse to maintain an ongoing relationship with their former partners.

Employment

Victim Information

All victims were employed at the time of their deaths.

Perpetrator Information

Of the perpetrators, one was employed and three were not. Of the three perpetrators unemployed, one was receiving disability and another received a settlement due to injury on the job just prior to the murder/suicide.

Unemployment at Time of Death

	Victim	Perpetrator
Employed	4	1
Unemployed		3 (1 on disability)

Drugs and Alcohol

Victim Information

There is no documented evidence to show that any of the victims were dependent on drugs or alcohol.

Perpetrator Information

In two of the four cases, the evidence showed that the perpetrators reportedly took prescription or illegal drugs prior to their deaths. One of those perpetrators was reported to have an extensive drug history, ultimately dying as a result of a drug overdose. This overdose occurred within 24 hours of the victim's murder.

In another of the homicides, the perpetrator was reported to be a frequent drinker. At the time of his suicide the autopsy identified illegal drugs in his system. In a third case, it was reported that one perpetrator was a very heavy social drinker.

Drugs and/or Alcohol

	At time of death	History of D/A
Victim	0	0
Perpetrator	2	4

Mental Health

Victim Information

Of the four victims, only one had mental health issues reported to police. This report was made by the family to the police about the victim’s depression regarding her dissolved relationship.

Perpetrator Information

Three of the four perpetrators had documented mental health issues, diagnosis and treatment, either reported by systems involved or family members interviewed. In these three instances, the perpetrators sought mental health treatment and were receiving mental health treatment at the time of homicide. In the instances where there were known mental health issues, it was reported by family members that the perpetrators were not taking prescribed medications, did not take them as prescribed, or abused them. In Case #1 and #3, there was evidence of voluntary mental health commitments.

In one of these cases, there was a family history of suicide. In two cases, the perpetrator had attempted suicide in the past.

Perpetrators Suicide History

	1	2	3	4
Threats of past suicide		x	x	
Attempts of past suicide		x	x	
Attempts of suicide at end of relationship		x		

Location of Homicides

Three of the homicides occurred at the victims' residences. In Case #4, the homicide occurred at the perpetrator's residence, which was the victim's previous residence. Actual death in each case occurred at different locations within the residences; one took place in the kitchen, one in the living room, one in the bedroom, and one in the backyard.

Cause of Death

Victim Information

In Case #1, the victim was severely beaten with a blunt object but died as a result of injuries inflicted by a knife. In Cases #2 and #3, the victims died as a result of a gunshot wound, although in Case #3, she was first threatened with a knife. In Case #4, the victim died as a result of asphyxiation and injuries sustained from blunt force trauma.

Victim's Cause of Death

	1	2	3	4
Gunshot		X	X	
Blunt Force Trauma – Primary				
Blunt Force Trauma – Secondary	X			X
Knife	X			
Asphyxiation				X

Perpetrator Information

In Cases #2 and #4, the perpetrators' deaths were a result of self inflicted gunshot wounds. In Case #1, the perpetrator died as a result of self administered drug overdose. In Case #3, the perpetrator's death was the result of a gunshot wound inflicted by a third party.

Perpetrator's Cause of Death

Gunshot – Self Inflicted	2
Gunshot – Third Party	1
Drug overdose	1

Gun Involvement

In Case #2, the gun had been purchased two days prior to the homicide. In Case #3, guns had been in the home for some time. It was reported that guns had been either brandished or used as a threat in the past in both cases. It was also reported that in Case #4, there were guns present in the home and they had been used as a threat, but were not used as a threat in the actual homicide.

Criminal History and History of Previous Protection from Abuse Proceedings

Victim Information

The victims had no reported criminal history or Protection from Abuse Order history.

Perpetrator Information

Prior to the homicides, all four perpetrators had a known criminal history. One perpetrator was under the supervision of Bucks County Adult Probation and Parole Department at the time of the homicide. One perpetrator had a prior Protection From Abuse filed against him as a result of violence in a previous relationship.

Perpetrators Criminal History

	1	2	3	4
Non-violent crime arrest		x		
Domestic violence criminal arrest				
Other violent crime arrests	x		x	
Drug and Alcohol Arrests	x			x
PFA		x		

History of Domestic Abuse

There was a striking lack of reported physical violence in these cases. In one instance the family, not the victim, contacted the police about their concerns of physical violence in the relationship. None of the victims contacted the police to report any physical violence.

In all cases, many other forms of abuse were present. Stalking and controlling behaviors by the perpetrator were commonly reported by both systems and family members. These stalking behaviors included using tracking devices, as well as recording devices, to monitor victims conversations and activities. Abusive controlling behavior took the form of isolation from family and friends, numerous daily phone calls to check on whereabouts and activities, and demands to account for all money spent. Psychological abuse was also prevalent in all cases. In two of the homicides, victims' families reported that victims were threatened with a gun.

History of Abuse with Victim

Physical Abuse	1
Verbal Abuse	4
Emotional	4
Financial Control	2
Stalking	3
Isolation	3
Threats to Kill	2
Weapons Used as Threats	2

Although the police had no prior contact with the victims regarding any physical violence, in all of the homicides the police were called to the homes regarding other issues. In Case #4, the police were called to the residence several times regarding issues with a child, and as a standby for the victim to remove property from the home. In three of the homicides, the police were notified previously regarding concerns about the perpetrator being suicidal.

Systems Involved

The Commission researched information on what agencies or organization had contact with the victim or perpetrator in each of the cases. The Commission sought to determine if any agency had the opportunity to intervene or educate the victim or perpetrators. While numerous systems had contact with the victim, there was no evidence that there was an intentional failure to act. Victims had limited contact with agencies for help related to the domestic abuse. Although the below charts indicate that each case had contact with law enforcement, three of the cases did not involve allegations of domestic abuse.

Systems Involved with Victim

	1	2	3	4
Police	x	x	x	X
A Woman's Place			x	
Adult Probation & Parole				
Mental Health	x			
NOVA				
Children & Youth				
Drugs and Alcohol				
Bucks County Legal Aid				

Systems Involved with Perpetrator

	1	2	3	4
Police	x	x	x	x
A Woman's Place				
Adult Probation & Parole	x			
Mental Health	x	x	x	
NOVA				
Children & Youth				
Drugs and Alcohol	x			
Bucks County Legal Aid				

CONCLUSION

The Commission prefaces its conclusions by acknowledging that a review of only four cases makes it difficult to draw general inferences about the link between domestic abuse and the risk of future homicides. Each of these four cases is unique, and how much we can learn from them as a group or individually to apply to other situations is questionable. However, the review did raise several issues well worth considering in future efforts to end domestic abuse in Bucks County.

First, in looking at the four cases, the Commission was struck by the fact that factors frequently present in domestic abuse situations did not appear to be present in any of the cases reviewed. These include:

1. Ongoing conflict over custody of minor children.
2. Economic dependence by the victim on the perpetrator
3. Actual physical abuse to the victim prior to the homicide (in Case #1 the family suspected some physical abuse but the victim denied it.)
4. Significant involvement on the part of the victim with the several agencies and systems which deal with domestic abuse in the county. Because of the absence of contacts between the victim and agencies and systems in the county addressing domestic abuse, the Commission is not able to say whether services available in the community were effective or whether there are gaps in service.

What the Commission does feel it can conclude from these four cases is the increased risk for individuals arising from certain elements in their circumstances and in their relationship with their partner. These are often called lethality factors by people studying domestic abuse. Those factors found in most, if not all, of the four cases were:

1. Stalking, manipulation and controlling behaviors on the part of the perpetrator.

2. The presence of depression and suicidal ideation. In three of the four cases, there were reports of threats of suicide, if not actual attempts.
3. Imminent or recent separation of the victim from the perpetrator.
4. Easy access to guns or the presence of guns in the home. Guns were used in the death of two victims and three perpetrators.
5. Lack of recognition of real danger on the part of the victim. Reports from family and friends indicated that, in each case, the victim felt that she could control the situation and that there was nothing to be gained by going to an agency or the court for assistance. To some degree, the absence of physical abuse may have made each of them underestimate the seriousness and danger of their circumstances. This left family and friends, aware of problems and concerned, not knowing how to help their family member or friend.

The Commission concludes, based upon these four cases, that factors present in all of the cases that were indicators of potential lethal violence on the part of the perpetrator towards the victim that were not sufficiently recognized or acted on by third parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

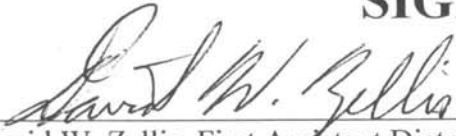
Based upon the review of the four cases described above, and the conclusions drawn from those cases, the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. A public awareness campaign should be undertaken to educate the public and all parties who serve the public about the broad and potentially lethal nature of domestic abuse. It is important to make the public and all those who come into contact with victims aware that potentially lethal domestic abuse can involve emotional abuse, financial abuse, controlling behaviors, and stalking behaviors without involving any physical abuse. Because of the lack of prior physical abuse in the four cases studied, the Commission recommends the use of the term “domestic abuse” rather than “domestic violence” in discussions of lethality risks and dangers. The Commission recommends, in particular, education in the following areas:
 - The extremely serious nature of stalking. Stalking behaviors were particularly prevalent in the four cases examined and the public, as well as those serving the public in law enforcement and through the legal system, should be further educated about the serious nature of this crime.
 - The increased risk of lethality when the victim terminates or attempts to terminate his or her relationship with the abuser. All public awareness campaigns and educational programs should include and emphasize the danger posed in these situations.
 - Educating the public should include teaching school age children about healthy relationships.
 - Education should also include the training of employees in various industries, particularly those that come in contact with potential victims of domestic abuse.
2. A determined effort should be made to help domestic abuse victims and abusers themselves identify and access resources and

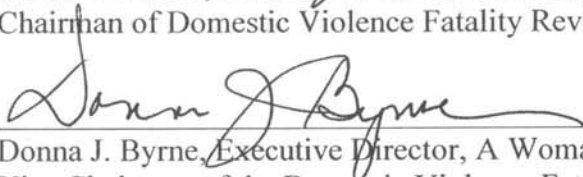
services available to them. A list of resources is attached as an addendum. In Bucks County, A Woman's Place provides comprehensive free, private and confidential support, education, outreach and advocacy for domestic abuse victims and their family members and can be accessed through their toll-free hotline 1-800-220-8116.

3. The Pennsylvania and federal legislature should immediately address the pertinent issues surrounding access and availability of gun purchases to individuals with a history of domestic abuse or mental illness. Currently, Pennsylvania residents cannot purchase a firearm if they were the subject of an involuntary mental health commitment or have an active Protection from Abuse Order in place against them. The Commission recommends expanding guns laws to further restrict guns sales to individuals who have had a voluntary mental health commitment or history of a Protection From Abuse Order.
4. Staff in the mental health and substance abuse treatment fields should be trained to be able to recognize the risk factors in these potentially lethal relationships. These risk factors include a perpetrator's suicidal threats or ideation, a fact apparent in many of these cases. Mental health and substance abuse professionals can then utilize this information to advise clients of the warning signs, and better identify and take precautions to protect the victims.
5. An ongoing multi-disciplinary team should be established to educate, collaborate and advocate in an effort to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and related fatalities in Bucks County.

SIGNATURE PAGE



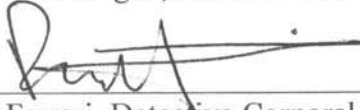
David W. Zellis, First Assistant District Attorney
Chairman of Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission



Donna J. Byrne, Executive Director, A Woman's Place
Vice Chairman of the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission



Richard Mangan, Former Chief Solebury Township Police Department



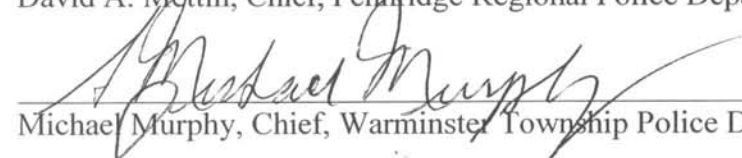
Roy Ferrari, Detective-Corporal, Solebury Township Police Department



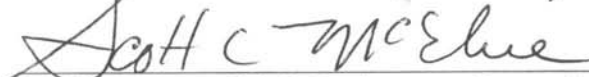
Jonathan Koretzky, Corporal, Solebury Township Police Department



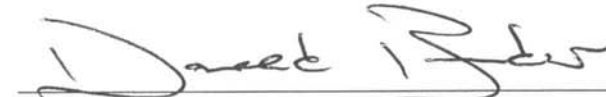
David A. Mettin, Chief, Pennridge Regional Police Department



Michael Murphy, Chief, Warminster Township Police Department



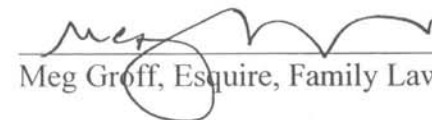
Scott McElree, Chief, Quakertown Borough Police Department



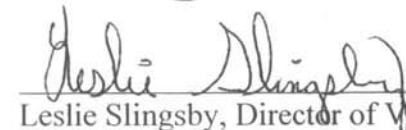
Donald Bender, Sergeant, Quakertown Borough Police Department



Linda Thomas, Legal Advocacy Director, A Woman's Place



Meg Groff, Esquire, Family Law Attorney



Leslie Slingsby, Director of Victim Services, NOVA



Elizabeth Fritsch, Esq, Co-Executive Director, Legal Aid of Southeastern PA



Jay Deppeler, Ravenhill Psychological Services



Rosalie Benedetto Flemke, Domestic Violence Program Manager at Bensalem Township Police Department



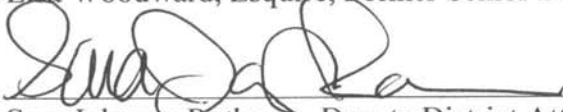
Mary Sonke, Director of Services, A Woman's Place



Barbara J. Miller, Children Services Director, Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation



Lisa Woodward, Esquire, Former Senior Deputy District Attorney



Sara Johnson Rothman, Deputy District Attorney

***Legal of Southeastern Pennsylvania does not join in recommendation number 3, and takes no position regarding legislation.