

Select Committee on Children and Judiciary Committee's
Joint Informational Hearing on
Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse

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The Office of the Victim Advocate is an independent state agency who is mandated to promote and protect the rights of crime victims. By definition the OVA's mandates include working with cases involving child abuse. Over the years one of the frustrations has been the failure of those who interact with children, to make the referral to DCF as a mandated reporter. Our communities rely upon the mandated reporter who is privileged to work with our children, and, in turn, identify and report suspected child abuse and neglect. The mandated reporter is our children's protector from abuse, neglect and perpetrators of child abuse.

Through the investigation of the OVA and working with domestic violence victims, the OVA has indentified a gap in the mandated reporting procedures. This gap occurs when law enforcement officials neglect to comply with their responsibilities as mandated reporters in a domestic violence case. Typically this occurs when there is domestic violence in the home and children are either present or direct victims of the abuse. Without the report, DCF will not be able to provide the additional resources to assist the child and provide protection to the child.

Once a criminal matter is brought to our state's courts there are two more layers of mandated reporters, Judicial's Family Relations Officers and domestic violence advocates. These two entities interact with the crime victim and become familiar with the case. There has traditionally been a gap in the reporting at this second level. In the state of MA there is an in court domestic violence advocate who will make the DCF referral from court if the law enforcement officials have neglected to do so. It is through exploring these layers of reporting in CT, that we can capitalize on protecting our children and develop appropriate training, education and policy development.

The OVA is happy to report that we have been working with DCF, under the new Administration, as well as CCADV, to strengthen the partnerships with advocates and staff of DCF through future trainings and education. Our focus is towards strengthening the mandated reporting at the Court level, so our children are bettered protected, and can benefit from all the levels of services available to them through all available resources. The response from CCADV and DCF has been remarkable and positive.

Additionally, just last week the Task force on Law Enforcement's Response to Family Violence, to which the OVA is a member, had decided to include a recommendation that the Family Violence Report from law enforcement include a check box of sorts to show whether a referral was made to DCF. The hope is to one, encourage proper reporting at the law enforcement level and two capture statistics on how often the referrals are being made.

It is this coordinated community response, in this case involving DCF, CCADV, the 18 member programs and the OVA, which will enhance our state's responsiveness and increase protection to our children.