

FAMILY LAW CONFERENCE

JUSTICE FOR SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Transforming an Inequitable Family Law System

October 13-14, 2022 | NYC (In-Person & Virtual)

ABOUT

This conference will bring together family law practitioners, survivor leaders, social service professionals, members of the judiciary, and advocates to address systemic injustices faced by survivors of intimate partner violence within New York State's family law system and amplify the need for reform. It will provide an opportunity to examine the significant challenges for survivors in family law cases, learn about key legal developments, engage and collaborate with practitioners and advocates across organizations, and develop meaningful solutions. The conference will include panel discussions, advocacy planning, and networking opportunities.

KEYNOTE PANEL

Confronting Systemic Injustice: How Bias Manifests in New York State's Family Law System

In an effort to confront intersectional, systemic injustice, panelists will provide insight into how litigants and practitioners experience bias in the courts, and the role bias plays in perpetuating an under-resourced court system that serves the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Panelists will highlight the findings of the *Report from the Special Adviser on Equal Justice in the New York State Courts* produced by Jeh Johnson, the *Gender Survey 2020* produced by the NYS Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts, and the reforms being instituted in response. Panelists will consider strategies for reducing bias, including training, oversight, and institutional reform.

Aligning the Law with Today's Conceptions of Domestic Violence: Coercive Control, Lethality, and Femicide

This panel will explore how the law and legal practice can keep pace with today's understanding of domestic violence, including the dynamics of coercive control, the use of lethality assessment tools, and the tragic commission of femicide. Panelists will discuss evidence-based lethality assessment tools and how courts should utilize them. Panelists will also highlight proposed coercive control legislation in New York and enacted statutes from other states.

Fixing What's Broken: Reforming the System

This panel will build upon the challenges identified throughout the conference and discuss a variety of reforms that would transform New York State's inequitable court system. Panelists will describe how New York State's antiquated court system with insufficient resources for the family courts has negatively impacted the safety and security of women, children, and families, and focus on proposals to enhance access to justice for all New Yorkers.

Protecting the Child: Focus on Intimate Partner Violence and Custody Law

This panel will examine custody and visitation cases involving child safety concerns and address current trends, including the growing use of parental alienation allegations. Panelists will review empirical data on bias towards victims in custody outcomes, examine how gender bias and differing parenting standards negatively impact visitation and custody decisions, share practitioner experiences, and consider legislation designed to address these challenges.

Promoting Equity from the Bench: Judicial Selection, Oversight, and Training

This panel will examine how judges are elected, appointed, and assigned to family court, the training they receive, and the resulting shortage of judges with the appropriate knowledge, background, and/or experience to handle the complexity and volume of family law cases involving intimate partner violence. Panelists will discuss the inequity for litigants created by short-term judicial family court assignments and the need for increased judicial transparency and accountability.

Self-Care as Self-Preservation: Understanding Vicarious Trauma & Enhancing Support for Providers

Survivors of intimate partner violence experience myriad forms of trauma, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence, poor treatment by systems, and racism. Domestic violence legal practitioners are steeped in trauma, yet often do not realize they are experiencing vicarious trauma until they exhibit symptoms. This panel will define trauma and vicarious trauma, identify the ways practitioners experience and express them, discuss the need for institutional support, and brainstorm individual and peer support strategies.

Addressing Barriers: Advocacy Agenda & Action Plans

During this closing strategy session, participants will collaborate to develop solutions to the challenges explored throughout the conference. Proposed recommendations may include immersive training, court reform, increased resources, new legislation, and changes to judicial selection, credentialing, and accountability. The conference will end with participants developing action plans and an advocacy agenda.