

UNIFIED APPROACH HAILED AS “NO BRAINER” TO COMBAT TRIPLE THREAT OF CHILD ABUSE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Calling it a “national epidemic,” judges, lawyers, teachers and social workers from around the nation came together in a community forum to discuss how the combination of domestic violence, child abuse and juvenile delinquency is destroying families and ruining the lives of children.

“If we don’t do something soon, it will continue to get worse and worse,” lamented District Court Judge James Riehl of Kitsap County, Washington, one of the program organizers. Riehl, who chairs the National Conference of Specialized Court Judges said, “Children are really the forgotten ones in this country.”



James Riehl
Chair, National Conference of
Specialized Court Judges

For the past ten years, Riehl says he’s been on a crusade to encourage his colleagues on the bench to use their power to get all the disciplines in the community—law enforcement officials, social workers, religious leaders, and educators—to come to the table to work out solutions.

“Having a unified approach suddenly seems like a no-brainer,” noted Kathleen Kroll, Chief Judge of the 15th Circuit of Florida, who described how a holistic, social service component is working in Palm Beach County.

When the school district couldn’t afford it, said Kathleen Baxter, Division Director for the San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center, corporate donors funded training programs for all school personnel, including bus drivers and any person coming in contact with children. A separate program provided safety training for K-3rd grade students.

“We feel we’ve created a safety net,” said Baxter, who believes only a fraction of the abuse cases are reported. “We’ve all had the situation where we have all felt that we were returning that child to a very risky situation, but there wasn’t enough to keep the child out of that home, so the child goes home.”

“We may all be liable as people who sat in that room as professionals and didn’t remove that child,” warned Baxter. She described cases in California where years after the fact, a person who had been abused as a child sued the medical community for failure to protect

them by not reporting the abuse. They claimed that since the Child Abuse Reporting Act was in effect at that time, the pediatrician should have known better.



Pamila Brown
Incoming Chair, ABA Commission
on Domestic Violence

Pamila Brown, incoming chair of the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence said that behavior is an extraordinary indicator of child abuse. Telltale signs among abused children are temper tantrums, lying, starting fires, harming animals, withdrawing into themselves, pulling away from their peers, and regressing to earlier stages of child development.

“When a child’s mind is in survival mode, it’s hard to get him engaged in the classroom setting so that he is able to learn,” said Brown.

“Now there’s a national teen dating violence hotline, and even though it’s called a teen dating violence hotline, it’s for any young person who is the subject of abuse,” she said. The phone number is 1(866) 331-9474.

[*Hear Judge James Riehl describe the challenges and the solutions of this “triple threat.”*](#)