

## President's Message

## Protecting Families During the Pandemic

By 2020-21 President Harry J. (Skip) Philips, Jr.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence recently reported that one in three women in the United States has experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. According to the study "When Men Murder Women" by the Violence Policy Center, Louisiana is ranked second highest in the nation for homicides related to domestic abuse. Domestic violence cuts across family, racial and socioeconomic lines — impacting individuals regardless of race, age or economic stature.

### Kelly's Story

*Kelly endured years of abuse at the hands of her boyfriend. He berated her, beat her and choked her. In the fall of 2019, when she was several months pregnant with their child, he threatened to kill her. In fear for her life, she finally broke off the relationship.*

*Kelly believed it was important for her child to have a relationship with his father, so she allowed him to have limited visitation. In April, with the stay-at-home order still in place, the child's father asked to deliver a gift to the child. As soon as he arrived, he snatched the child and fled. He refused to answer her phone calls or respond to any of her attempts to contact him.*

*She called the police and was told they could not do anything without a restraining order from the court. With the help of a Southeast Louisiana Legal Services legal aid attorney, Kelly was able to obtain a temporary restraining order and her baby was safely returned to her.*

*It's critical for survivors of domestic abuse like Kelly to know that legal help is available for individuals experiencing — or at risk of — violence in their homes. This help can include getting protective orders against abusers, family custody*

*matters and other resources.*

I am proud to report that this year the Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) awarded more than \$550,000 in grants to domestic violence agencies across the state. These agencies provide legal services for women and children including a 24-hour crisis line; shelter for abused spouses and their children; legal services; education concerning domestic and dating violence; and establishing collaborative relationships with law enforcement, judges, clerks of court and prosecutors.

As lawyers, we have an opportunity to help victims gain access to the legal system regardless of financial situation and to help break the cycle of violence in their families. You can help by supporting the LBF.

The LBF proudly supports the following domestic violence programs (with office locations and hotlines listed):

▶ Beauregard Community Concerns (DeRidder and Leesville; 337-462-1452).

▶ Catholic Charities of New Orleans/Project SAVE (New Orleans; 504-310-6827).

▶ Chez Hope, Inc. (Franklin and Thibodaux; 337-828-4200).

▶ D.A.R.T. of Lincoln (Lincoln, Jackson, Union, Bienville and Claiborne Parishes; 318-251-2255 or 888-411-1333).

▶ Faith House, Inc. (Lafayette; 888-411-1333).

▶ Family Justice Center of Central Louisiana (Pineville; 504-866-9554).

▶ Jeff Davis Communities Against Domestic Abuse (Jennings; 866-883-2232).



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▶ Metro Centers for Community Advocacy (Jefferson; 504-837-5400).

▶ Oasis (Lake Charles, Allen and Cameron; 337-436-4552).

▶ Project Celebration (Many; 318-256-6242).

▶ Safe Harbor (Covington and Slidell; 985-626-5740).

▶ Southeast Spouse Abuse Program (Covington, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Marrero and New Orleans; 888-411-1333).

▶ St. Bernard Battered Women's Program, Inc. (St. Bernard; 504-277-3177).

▶ The Haven, Inc. (Houma; 800-915-0045).

▶ The Wellspring Alliance for Families (Monroe; 318-651-9314).

Acadiana Legal Services, (337)237-4320, and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, (504)529-1000, also provide domestic violence services.

We know that during and after a disaster such as the COVID-19 pandemic, civil legal aid needs are dramatically increased. Experts expect incidents of domestic violence will increase as the pandemic continues. Reports of domestic violence tripled in China at the height of the pandemic, and police officers and survivor advocates across the United States fear the same will happen here.

Avoiding public spaces and working remotely can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but, for some, staying home may not be the safest option and can exacerbate fragile relationships and volatile situations. Added stress and financial strain may also be a factor in increasing violence in the home.

Please remember to support the LBF. Go to [www.raisingthebar.org](http://www.raisingthebar.org) to make a donation. We have an opportunity to make Louisiana's civil justice system more accessible to all, and we need your help.