



*The Judiciary, State of Hawaii*

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor**

Senator Clayton Hee, Chair  
Senator Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, Vice Chair

Friday, February 3, 2012  
State Capitol, Conference Room 016

by  
R. Mark Browning  
Deputy Chief Judge / Senior Judge  
Family Court of the First Circuit

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**Bill No. and Title:** Senate Bill No. 2505, Relating to Temporary Restraining Orders.

**Purpose:** Provides for the issuance of temporary restraining orders (“TROs”) by the Family and District Courts upon submission of sufficient oral sworn testimony communicated to the court by telephone, radio, or other means of electronic voice communication, if exigent circumstances exist sufficient to excuse the failure of the applicant to appear personally

**Judiciary's Position:**

Although the Judiciary supports procedures that provide safety for victims of domestic violence, we are unable to support this bill, for the reasons noted below, and so respectfully ask that the bill be held.

(1) In addition to “law enforcement officer”, this bill allows the Supreme Court, through its rule making authority, to designate other “persons” to assist applicants requesting temporary restraining orders. Our concern is that the process will involve time-sensitive responses to applicants as well as the responsibility “to enter the court’s authorization verbatim on the appropriate form, designated the duplicate original temporary restraining order.” It may be clearer to restrict the designation to “law enforcement” and delete references to other “persons.”

(2) Limiting this bill to law enforcement officers is particularly important since this bill allows an officer to create a valid court order since the person assisting the petitioner creates a form that is “designated as the duplicate original temporary restraining order.” This is an



unusual scheme. Currently, the police have the authority in domestic abuse cases, using their own powers, to issue “stay away orders” sufficient to give the petitioner enough time to obtain a temporary restraining order through the usual court procedures. This bill allows the police (generally recognized as part of the Executive branch of government) to, in effect, be “deputized” as a member of the Judicial branch of government in both civil and domestic TRO cases and empowered to create an original court order (a responsibility generally kept strictly to judges and their staff in order to preserve the public’s confidence in court orders and to prevent fraud).

(3) These TROs are required to be served before they become enforceable. Thus, although they are “effective” when the court grants it, they are not “enforceable” until the respondent has been served with the court order. This means that, if a respondent contacts or abuses the petitioner after the order has been granted but before the order has been served, the respondent cannot be prosecuted for violating the court order (although the respondent could be arrested in the event a crime were committed). The Supreme Court may be unable to change this requirement of service through their rulemaking authority. In contrast, a respondent can be prosecuted for disobeying a valid police issued stay-away order.

(4) Additionally, without an explicit authorization from the Legislature, the Supreme Court would not have the authority to direct police procedures through their rulemaking authority.

(5) At this time, such orders are not served between the hours of 10pm to 6am, unless a judge specifically allows this in writing on the summons. If this bill’s intent is that process will be available 24 hours a day, then the bill should explicitly allow service 24 hours a day in order to keep this proposed process as streamlined as possible.

(6) We are unsure of the scope of this bill. Are these procedures applicable during regular court hours? Does this bill require this process to be available 24 hours a day?

(7) If this bill requires 24 hour coverage, the Judiciary will need additional appropriations, beyond our current budget requests, in order to provide these services. On the neighbor islands, it is anticipated that staff and judges will have to be available after-hours on an on-call basis. On Oahu, because of the size of its population, we anticipate the need to develop new after-hours staff dedicated for this purpose as well as assigning this as a “calendar” for a judge rather than leaving it on an on-call basis. We have not developed a cost plan primarily because of the ambiguities in this bill. However, as an example, pursuant to collective bargaining, the minimum cost for one Social Worker IV position (the person who would have the responsibility for fielding the contacts from law enforcement) to be on call would be



approximately \$32,948.23 annually. This includes compensation for standby duty, mileage, night differential, and meal costs.

(8) Additionally, new equipment and software may be needed to develop this new system of processing TROs (for example, a new interface between law enforcement and the courts may be needed).

(9) Additionally, a training process will have to developed for both Judiciary and law enforcement personnel. In our experience, we have found that, when Petitioners in family court cases are assisted by untrained persons, there may be a greater dissatisfaction with the court process (for example, when a Petitioner claims that a non-family court related person did not accurately express the Petitioner's claims and statements—this in turn gives the Respondent less than adequate notice about the claims he/she will be required to address in court).

(10) There cannot be unfettered contact between the petitioner and the judge for very practical reasons. There are and will be procedural requirements that both the Petitioner and the law enforcement officer will need help with. Based on our experience, we have also found that Petitioners need help focusing their statements. While court officers are extremely careful not to place statements in the mouths of Petitioners and are extremely careful not to act as advocates, they provide necessary help in explaining what is and is not relevant or what may or may not be significant. For example, a Petitioner might present a rather minor annoyance with the Respondent as the basis for a TRO and then happen to mention as an aside an actual physical abuse event which they did not consider to be important because of the frequency of such occurrences. Court staff will also have to create files and complete paperwork after the judge has completed his/her part of the process.

(11) Besides the practical, there is another extremely important reason to avoid direct personal contact with the judge. Such a procedure is inherently unfair to Respondents and will be rightfully perceived as such. When court staff assists in the preparation of the petition or complaint, the judge is not exposed to all of the extraneous statements and information imparted by the Petitioner. The judge and the Respondent will read the same statements. The Respondent is assured that there were no ex parte communications between the Petitioner and the judge and that, at the initial hearing, both parties will be appearing before a judge at the same time.

All of the above listed factors relate to judicial processes. However, we also have a few policy comments to raise for the Legislature's consideration.

(A) Many district court cases are less volatile than family court cases since intimate relationships are not usually involved. Also, unlike family court cases, district court orders are generally less intrusive (for example, family court respondents can be ordered to vacate their



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home immediately and to have no further contact with their children until at least the first return hearing). If this bill intends 24 hour coverage, its implementation may be potentially very costly and so need for such coverage in district court cases may have to be re-examined.

(B) Allowing a more relaxed and remote process may possibly allow for more false claims based on improper motives.

(C) Besides the possibility of an increase in false claims, there may be an overall increase in petitions filed in both family and district courts. Of course, all valid petitions and complaints should be dealt with expeditiously and properly. However, if, for whatever reason, there is an overall increase in these petitions and complaints, the Judiciary will require increased judicial resources or delays may result.

As discussed above, these matters are not simple and the solutions are not clearly indicated. Furthermore, the Supreme Court does not have the legislative authority to simply promulgate rules that would have the effect of law over all persons and all agencies. Lastly, as discussed above, the Judiciary and the family and district courts have done quite a bit to streamline processes and to make forms and processes more “user friendly” over the years. And, we intend to continue to work toward greater improvements.

If this bill should pass, we respectfully request that the effective date be at least two years from the date of promulgation, *i.e.*, sometime beyond the summer of 2014, in order to allow the Judiciary and all law enforcement agencies to first develop the procedures for all the different circuits, then enough time to seek adequate appropriations from the Legislature, and then enough time to train and implement the new program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

HAWAII  
STATE  
COMMISSION  
ON THE  
STATUS  
OF  
WOMEN



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February 2, 2012

**Testimony in Opposition to SB 2505**

**To:** Senator Clayton Hee, Chair  
Senator Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor

**From:** Catherine Betts, Esq., Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

**Re:** Testimony in Opposition to SB 2505, Relating to Temporary Restraining Orders

On behalf of the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. I would like to express my opposition to this bill, which would allow petitioners for temporary restraining orders to provide oral sworn testimony or a complaint to a judge by electronic means.

While this legislation may be well intentioned in that it seeks to allow victims of domestic violence to bypass some steps in the path toward safety, I do not believe that greater safety for victims will be the actual result. The restraining order process is sometimes the only means toward safety for a victim and her children. Increasingly, batterers have learned how to manipulate the TRO process in order to further abuse their partners and children and once again, to reassert control over them. Often times, batterers race to the courthouse in order to claim that they are the true victims, and their partners, the actual batterers.<sup>1</sup>

By allowing petitioners to provide oral sworn testimony to law enforcement officers or by providing a complaint to a judge by electronic means, this legislation would allow further manipulation of the protective order system, making it difficult for the courts to discern and assess the true levels of violence and danger. Further, the bill does not provide for the law enforcement officer, or "other person designated by rule to assist the applicant" to be well trained in the dynamics of domestic violence or in assessing credibility of the petitioner. This further muddies the process and enables batterers to potentially manipulate the system in order to gain control over their victims. It also makes it difficult for victims, including immigrants and non-English speakers, who may be reluctant to seek assistance from law enforcement.

Finally, when victims come to court to apply for a restraining order, they are given the opportunity to receive crisis support, safety planning, relevant referrals and information about service of process. These services are essential to victims' safety and without these services in place, victims may be placed in greater danger. I respectfully request that this Committee not pass SB 2505.

Thank you for this opportunity,

Catherine Betts, Esq.

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<sup>1</sup> Lundy, Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, THE BATTERER AS PARENT: ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON FAMILY DYNAMICS (Sage Publications 2002).

The logo for the Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence features the acronym 'hscadv' in a stylized, lowercase font on the left, followed by the full name 'HAWAII STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE' in a bold, uppercase font. To the right of the text is a stylized map of the Hawaiian Islands in shades of green and yellow.

# hscadv HAWAII STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

To: The Honorable Clayton Hee, Chair  
The Honorable Maile Shimabukuro, Vice-Chair  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR

From: Veronika Geronimo, Executive Director  
Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

RE: SB2505 - OPPOSE

Hearing Date and Time: Friday, February 3 @ 10AM

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Good morning Chair Hee, Vice-Chair Shimabukuro, and members of Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor. The Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence respectfully submits the following testimony in opposition to SB2505. As a statewide coalition of domestic violence service providers, our mission is to engage communities and organizations to end domestic violence through education, advocacy, and action for social justice.

While we recognize the need to increase access to Temporary Restraining Orders for victims, the bill may have some dangerous unintended consequences. Without the proper safeguards in place, an electronic submission has the potential to wrongfully issue TROs to abusers posing as victims. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to abuse the TRO process. Abusers have been known to file false claims not because of fear of personal safety, but to exclude the victim from the home or prohibit contact with their children, as a way of retaliating, or further exerting power and control over a victim. Electronic means of filing TROs weakens the ability of the courts to assess the veracity of the petitioner, and accurately assess violence levels and danger.

At a time of limited state resources, it adds another burden on family court and already over-burdened court staff. The proposed law would either add costs to hire additional staff or would force the existing staff to delay other work (like issuing arrest warrants, setting dockets, issuing subpoenas, etc.), taking away from resources and making it more difficult for legitimate victims of domestic violence obtain the protection they need. The bill also requires a level of cooperation and assistance from law enforcement that is likely far beyond law enforcement's current capacity and budget.

Furthermore, some victims, particularly immigrants, youth runaways and those with substance abuse problems, may be reluctant to seek assistance from law enforcement. It is essential for law enforcement or other persons assisting the petitioner with the sworn testimony to be well trained to discern the veracity of the petitioner. Domestic violence programs, would be better trained and equipped to be among those who are designated to assist the petitioner.

Thank you for your consideration.

**From:** [mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov)  
**To:** [JDLTestimony](#)  
**Cc:** [beverlyzigmond@juno.com](mailto:beverlyzigmond@juno.com)  
**Subject:** Testimony for SB2505 on 2/3/2012 10:00:00 AM  
**Date:** Thursday, February 02, 2012 1:27:50 PM

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Testimony for JDL 2/3/2012 10:00:00 AM SB2505

Conference room: 016  
Testifier position: Oppose  
Testifier will be present: No  
Submitted by: beverly zigmond  
Organization: Individual  
E-mail: [beverlyzigmond@juno.com](mailto:beverlyzigmond@juno.com)  
Submitted on: 2/2/2012

Comments:

Aloha. I OPPOSE SB2505 which would allow electronic filing of TROs. I believe that the real issue here is the availability of judges which this bill does not address; rather it would only require the Family Court to set up a new system, which will most certainly cost time and money---taking away from resources and making it more difficult for legitimate victims of domestic violence to obtain the protection they need.

As a domestic violence advocate, I OPPOSE this bill. Please do the same. mahalo