

Maria* escaped her abusive husband after he slammed her through a closed door. She and her young daughter found refuge and safety, until she was to “collect” child support directly from her abusive partner. Every two weeks, Maria was forced by her former abusive husband to have sexual intercourse- rape – in order to receive the child support.

Idaho’s women and children are facing a dangerous threat, and the stakes are immense. Our legislature is poised to dismantle our state’s child support enforcement system and it’s the low-income women and children in our state who will suffer the most.

Almost all, more than 90 percent, of custodial mothers with current or former abusive partners want and need to pursue child support - if they can do so safely. For women in abusive relationships, child support represents an opportunity to establish and maintain economic independence and stability for her children. Economic dependence is one of the main reasons that women remain with or return to an abusive partner. Mothers and children in Idaho — particularly families experiencing domestic violence and families from low-income households — will lose the safety and stability of Idaho’s child support enforcement system and various federal subsidies unless Idaho legislators change their minds.

These actions of a few of Idaho’s legislators are more than irresponsible, they are inhumane and unconscionable. Such harmful policies underscore the recently released Institute for Women’s Policy Research “Status of Women in the States: 2015” report, where Idaho was ranked 50th in a study comparing data on poverty and opportunity, violence and safety, health and well-being, reproductive rights, political participation and work and family. Idaho legislators’ actions demonstrate again and again – women and children are not valued in this state.

Domestic violence happens in Idaho. Each year more than 16,000 adults and children seek emergency and life-saving services from Idaho’s twenty-three community and tribal domestic violence programs. The child support enforcement system is essential for families impacted by violence because abuse often continues or increases after an individual escapes an abusive relationship.

The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when a woman

leaves an abusive partner. That is precisely the time when she needs to initiate child support to ensure economic stability and, frankly, that the most basic needs of the children are met – shelter, food, clothing, and health care. Idaho’s child support enforcement system has a vital role in reducing the risk of domestic violence and helping custodial parents pursue child support safely.

Without Idaho’s child support enforcement system, women in abusive relationships will hesitate to seek child support services, and even hesitate to escape an abusive relationship for fear for their and their children’s safety and economic stability. Maria attempted to collect child support on her own. On her last attempt, Maria’s abusive partner tried to strangle her. When law enforcement intervened, she was able to move past her shame and share the horrific circumstances she endured to collect child support. Our humanity demands that we prevent this from ever happening to another woman. Nor can we put women and children in the alternative position – stay and experience violence and harm, or leave and fall into poverty.

The Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence urges you to raise your voice and let the Idaho legislature know that dismantling the child support enforcement system is a real threat – the threat of increased violence for mothers who escaped an abusive relationship and economic instability for Idaho’s families. Now is the time for action – call or email your legislators today.

Kelly Miller, Executive Director

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence

*Name changed.