

OP-ED: Dulos Case Highlights The Need For Reforms



Jennifer Dulos warned us this would happen. The New Canaan mother of five spelled out her fears in her divorce papers in a chilling cry for help. She told the court she was afraid her estranged husband would become so enraged by her divorce filing he might hurt her.

Before his recent suicide, that husband, Fotis Dulos, stood accused of her alleged murder.

Jennifer's case resonates with so many of us who work to support and protect victims of domestic violence because her pleas for protection seem to have gone largely unheard. She's still missing, and we're all left to wonder how she was failed by the system.

As one of 14 presumed victims of intimate partner violence in Connecticut last year, Jennifer was not alone. She was part of a tragic dynamic where people in our communities are being murdered or harmed—often emotionally and physically—by the same people who once swore to love, protect and cherish them.

At The Center for Family Justice we work to help victims by providing free, confidential

crisis and supportive services for anyone impacted by domestic and sexual violence in six local communities, including Easton.

We know from working with our clients, who number close to 5,000 a year, abuse is an equal opportunity problem, which impacts every demographic in our society. In every town we serve, there are more Jennifers who live in fear of their abusers.

National statistics suggest that one in four women and one in seven men will be impacted by domestic abuse in their lifetime, and an average of 20 people per minute are being abused by an intimate partner in the United States each day.

The good news in this otherwise discouraging story is that more victims seem to be coming forward in the aftermath of the Dulos case. In the weeks after Jennifer went missing, calls to our crisis hotlines spiked.

The Dulos case has also brought to the forefront the critical need for reforms in the way domestic violence victims are treated in our courts. While we have made great progress, there is still a long way to go when it comes to providing comprehensive and systematic responses to the legitimate fears of someone living in danger from an intimate partner.

Recently, CFJ held its annual legislative breakfast where issues raised by the Dulos case were discussed.

Important reforms are being proposed in the current Connecticut General Assembly session, which could be game changers for our clients.

They include calls for the creation of safe spaces in our courts, so victims and survivors have a protected place to wait and avoid traumatizing interaction with their abusers. We also support calls for streamlining the ways our court system works to keep victims safe.

For some of our clients, the mere act of confronting their abuser in court can be so

intimidating it can force them to make the unbearable choice to continue to live with an abuser.

A legacy of this tragedy is that we must try harder than ever to foster a culture where victims are believed when they tell us they are afraid. Believing them could save their life.