

## PRESS RELEASE - FAMILY COURTS IN CRISIS - May 2013

### BMCC - Battered Women, Abused Children & Child Custody: A National Crisis - MAY 10<sup>TH</sup> & 11<sup>TH</sup>

For its 10-year anniversary, the Battered Mothers' Custody Conference shifted its yearly location from Albany, NY to the nation's capitol, drawing presenters, advocates and victims of domestic violence from all over the world.

The conference, hosted at the George Washington University Law School, kicked off Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup> with keynote addresses from well-known feminist author **Phyllis Chesler**, expounded on current ideas and findings from her classic, recently updated book *Mothers On Trial*, and family law attorney **Toby Kleinman**. Kleinman tied in a historical perspective of domestic violence issues with the current movement to protect women and children from abuse by partners and a legal system they have long alleged aids and abets abusers while punishing the victims.

Speakers at the conference included **Lynn Rosenthal**, the White House Advisor on Violence Against Women, who spoke of the White House's interest and concern on the issues involved, along with attorney **Joan Meier**. Ms. Meier who heads up DV Leap (Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project) at George Washington University and who recently published an article in the NY Times, *Home is Where the Harm Is*, spoke about recent developments within the federal government relating to custody and abuse cases in family court, including family court-specific provisions in VAWA.

**Dr. Joyanna Silberg**, of Trauma Disorder Services for Children and Adolescents and the Leadership Council discussed "turned-around" cases, with legal professor/author **Wendy Murphy** speaking on innovative ideas and approaches for improvement of court practices. **Terry O'Neil**, president of the NOW Foundation and chair of the NOW Political Action Committees also spoke about the efforts of NOW in facing the present crisis in family courts.

Indie producer **Garland Waller** hosted a screening of their documentary *No Way Out But One*, which was co-produced with **Barry Nolan**, and recounts the story of **Holly Collins**, who fled the country with her three young children after the courts discounted all evidence and assigned custody of her two older children to their abusive father. In a landmark case, Collins, who attended the conference with her children, was eventually granted asylum and refugee status by the government of the Netherlands.

**Els Lucas**, the Dutch attorney who represented Collins' case, and a Dutch ambassador accepted humanitarian awards from the conference. Attorney **Joan Zorza**, a leader in the movement to end domestic violence for more than 40 years, attended to accept a lifetime achievement award from the group. | [www.batteredmotherscustodyconference.org](http://www.batteredmotherscustodyconference.org) | Contact: [hannah@siena.edu](mailto:hannah@siena.edu)

### MOTHER'S OF LOST CHILDREN - WHITE HOUSE DEMONSTRATION - MAY 12<sup>TH</sup>

Mothers and activists from around the US joined forces, rallying in front of the White House to protest the national crisis in family courts. Their banners and out-cries, calling on President Obama to address the problems within the courts, were seen and heard by passers-by. The day's activities were wrapped up with a candle-light vigil in remembrance of the millions of victims in the US. | [www.mothersoflostchildren.org](http://www.mothersoflostchildren.org)

### NATIONAL SAFE CHILD COALITION - CAPITOL HILL LOBBYING - MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>

Mothers and advocates from all over the USA met to lobby Senators and Congressional members on Capitol Hill soliciting a Congressional Oversight Hearing on the failure of family courts in the USA to protect victims of domestic abuse during divorce and custodial hearings.

Senators from all 50 States were presented with the information about the crisis in family courts all over the United States, and activist met with staff members from the offices of Congressmen Ted Poe, Jim Costa, John Conyers, & Tony Cardenas. [www.nationalsafechildcoalition.com](http://www.nationalsafechildcoalition.com) / Contact: [tammi@nationalsafechildcoalition.com](mailto:tammi@nationalsafechildcoalition.com) (Tammi Stefano, Executive Director of Public Relations)

*For more information about speakers and participants of the events, please see the attached Newsletter.*