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Do We Have the Will to End Domestic Abuse?

To the Editor:

Congress has proposed federalizing domestic violence, and many states have introduced legislation to add mandatory jail sentences on conviction. Will this really help women, or will it just provide another opportunity for a candidate for office to show how tough he or she is on crime?

The problem is not the availability or unavailability of civil and criminal laws to address this serious problem. The problem is a lack of significant commitment by the public to create change. Most district attorneys, police and probation officers and courts are committed to doing what they can about these serious issues and the consequences of domestic violence.

What we most lack are resources: treatment, shelters and supervision of criminal defendants convicted of domestic violence-related issues. Reporters need to visit the shelters, ride with the police on calls, attend court hearings and interview the probation

officers handling large domestic violence caseloads. Maybe then the public might demand more appropriate resources.

More than half all domestic violence cases involve alcohol and other drug abuse by the perpetrator and victim. Yet while the drug abuse is not the root cause of the violence, it must still be treated.

Domestic issues like divorce, child custody, dependency, restraining orders, parenting and domestic violence should be heard by teams of specially assigned and trained judges to insure consistency of treatment and to avoid conflicting court orders. Most states have a judicial system comprising separate municipal and superior courts, in which such coordination would otherwise be difficult.

We in the system know that the children of domestic violence stand a greater-than-average chance of becoming adult victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. In the end, it is

for the sake of the children everywhere that we must do better and provide the resources needed to make an important impact on this deadly and growing social and criminal problem.

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Judge, Municipal Court
Santa Clara County
San Jose, Calif., July 15, 1994