

The Wyoming Victim-Centered Justice Initiative

A Mandate for Systemic Reform in Law Enforcement and Judicial Response to Domestic Violence, Coercive Control, and Complex Trauma

I. Executive Summary: *The Systemic Failure to Discern*

The current response to domestic violence in Wyoming is failing its most vulnerable citizens. Standard protocols are designed for clear-cut cases of physical assault but are woefully inadequate for the more insidious realities of **coercive control, psychological abuse, and trauma bonds**. This failure is institutional, stemming from a critical lack of mandatory, sophisticated training for both law enforcement and the judiciary on the psychobiology of trauma, the tactics of manipulation used by perpetrators with pathological personality structures, and the manifestations of complex PTSD in victims. This White Paper proposes the **Wyoming Victim-Centered Justice Initiative**—a comprehensive legislative package mandating a complete overhaul of professional standards. It requires all law enforcement officers and judges to undergo rigorous, recurrent training in trauma-informed response, coercive control, and perpetrator typologies. The goal is to transform first responders and arbiters from unwitting instruments of a manipulator's scheme into discerning assets for true victim safety and accountability.

II. The Problem: *Misidentification and Institutional Re-Victimization*

The core failure occurs when the system, lacking the proper tools for discernment, misidentifies the "primary aggressor."

- **The "Perfect Victim" Myth:** Systems are trained to look for a scared, compliant, visibly injured victim. However, a victim suffering from PTSD may present as angry, combative, emotionally dysregulated, or may even defend their abuser due to a trauma bond.
- **The "Reasonable" Perpetrator:** Conversely, a perpetrator, particularly one with narcissistic, antisocial, or psychopathic traits, can appear calm, rational, and conciliatory to authorities, expertly mimicking the language of concern.

- **The Quota System:** Policing quotas for citations or arrests create a perverse incentive to resolve complex human tragedies quickly, often by arresting the most visibly "disruptive" party—frequently the traumatized victim.

This dynamic is not theoretical; it is a daily occurrence that **silences victims, empowers abusers, and destroys lives.**

III. Current Wyoming and National Training Landscape: *A Patchwork of Inadequacy*

A. Law Enforcement Training Requirements

- **Basic Certification (Wyoming Peace Officer Standards and Training - POST):** While basic training includes a minimum of 16 hours on domestic violence, this is grossly insufficient to cover the complexities of trauma and coercion. The content is often focused on legal statutes and immediate threat assessment, not advanced psychology.
- **In-Service Training:** There are no specific, mandated yearly recertifications on DV, trauma, or coercive control, leading to fragmented and unreliable standards across the state.

B. Judicial Training Requirements

- **Wyoming Statute § 5-9-107:** This statute mandates that judges and magistrates complete domestic violence training within one year of taking office.
- **The Gap:** The law does not specify the duration, quality, or recurring frequency of this training. There is no mandate for education on personality disorders, trauma responses, or coercive control tactics. A one-time course is useless against sophisticated courtroom manipulation.

IV. The Proposed Blueprint: *The Wyoming Victim-Centered Justice Act*

This proposed Act would amend relevant state statutes to create a new, non-negotiable standard for all justice system professionals.

A. Mandatory, Standardized Curriculum for Law Enforcement

1. Basic Academy Expansion (Minimum 80 Hours):

- **The Psychobiology of Trauma (20 hrs):** How trauma impacts the brain (amygdala, prefrontal cortex) and creates fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses.
- **Coercive Control & The Anatomy of Abuse (20 hrs):** Moving beyond physical violence to teach the patterns of isolation, gaslighting, financial control, and technological stalking.
- **Perpetrator Typologies and Manipulation Tactics (20 hrs):** In-depth study of narcissistic, antisocial, and borderline personality structures as they manifest in abuse. Training on how these individuals "perform" for authority figures and systematically discredit their victims.
- **Victim-Centered Interviewing & Evidence Collection (20 hrs):** Techniques for de-escalating a traumatized person; asking open-ended questions; and documenting non-physical evidence of coercion (text messages, control of finances, witness statements about isolation).

2. Annual In-Service Recertification (Mandatory 40 Hours/Year):

- Coercive Control Updates (8 hrs)
- Trauma-Informed Tactical Response (8 hrs)
- Child Victims and Grooming Behaviors (8 hrs)
- The Neurobiology of Addiction in Trauma Survivors (8 hrs) - Understanding self-medication as a trauma symptom, not a cause.
- "Sitting with the Enemy" (8 hrs): A required seminar where officers listen to and analyze recorded interviews with convicted abusers, participate in facilitated discussions with survivors, and hear from reformed perpetrators.

B. Mandatory, Standardized Curriculum for the Judiciary

1. Initial Bench Training (Mandatory 60-Hour Certification):

- **Advanced Coercive Control in the Courtroom (20 hrs):** Identifying how abusers use the legal system for continued harassment (vexatious litigation, manipulating children).

- **Evaluating Evidence of Non-Physical Abuse (20 hrs):** How to give legal weight to journals, financial records, and patterns of behavior that constitute coercive control.
- **Personality Disorders and Courtroom Manipulation (20 hrs):** Training on how to maintain control of a courtroom when a litigant is using charm, intimidation, or playing the victim.

2. Biennial Judicial Recertification (Mandatory 24 Hours):

A required advanced course focusing on the latest research in trauma, coercive control, and best practices in issuing protection orders, managing custody evaluations, and sentencing.

C. Structural and Policy Reforms

- **Ban on Quotas:** Legislation that explicitly prohibits state and local law enforcement agencies from establishing ticket, arrest, or citation quotas, removing the incentive for rushed, poor-judgment calls in complex DV situations.
- **Statewide Response Protocol:** The development of a single, statewide "Complex Domestic Violence Incident" response protocol that emphasizes evidence gathering over immediate arrest, requiring officers to complete a mandatory checklist for indicators of coercive control.
- **Civilian Oversight and Curriculum Validation:** A permanent oversight committee, comprising a majority of domestic violence survivors, advocates, and clinical experts, to validate all training curricula and review incidents of alleged misidentification.

V. Conclusion and Call to Action

The current system is not merely broken; it is actively harmful. It rewards psychological sophistication in abusers and punishes the legitimate trauma responses of victims. By enacting the **Wyoming Victim-Centered Justice Act**, the state can become a national leader in eradicating institutional abuse and building a justice system worthy of its name. This is a fundamental test of our commitment to true justice and the safety of our most vulnerable residents. We must equip our frontline responders and arbiters with the knowledge to see what is truly happening, not just what is easiest to see.

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