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I N   S E N A T E

May 15, 2012

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Introduced by Sen. JOHNSON -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Children and Families

AN ACT to amend the family court act, in relation to the basis for removal of children

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

1     Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as "Melinda's  
2     law".

3     S 2. Legislative intent. The legislature hereby finds and declares  
4     that in cases of battered spouse syndrome the abuse sometimes moves from  
5     the spouse to the children. Once the abusive spouse begins to over-dis-  
6     cipline the children, they will often use threats or the removal of the  
7     children by child protective services as a means to compel subjugation  
8     from the non-abusive spouse. In addition, the abusive spouse prevents  
9     the reporting of such incidents to child protective services by making  
10    the non-abusive spouse an accomplice in this abuse. Under this threat,  
11    children are subjected to escalating abuse that could have been  
12    prevented if the non-abusive spouse had a safe harbor to report such  
13    abuse at the early stages without fear of losing their children. By this  
14    act the legislature intends to take such tool away from the abusive  
15    spouse by providing the non-abusive spouse a way to report such inci-  
16    dents without fear of having their children removed from their custody.

17    The sequence of events above are an apt description of "Melinda".

18    Melinda is a woman suffering from battered women's syndrome. She has  
19    been abused by her husband over a twenty year period. The abuse had been  
20    verbal, psychological, and physical. She has taken the abuse in the  
21    belief that her children needed a father.

22    Recently the abuse has been transferred to the children. It started  
23    with excessive spanking, locking a young teenager in the basement, and  
24    pushing a five year old to the ground.

25    Melinda confronted her husband and put herself between her husband and  
26    her children resulting in a black-eye (to Melinda).

27    She told her husband that she would not let him hit the children and  
28    would call the police and have him arrested.

EXPLANATION--Matter in *ITALICS* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets  
[ ] is old law to be omitted.

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1 Her husband responded that if she called the police, her children  
2 would be taken away from her by Child Protective Services.

3 The husband recently graduated to hitting his teenage son with a wood-  
4 en rod leaving welts.

5 The abuse in this cycle of domestic violence is escalated over time  
6 when the abuser believes that the non-abusive parent or caretaker is  
7 afraid to report such abuse, under the fear of losing their children.

8 By creating a safe harbor under Melinda's Law we have the opportunity  
9 to prevent the escalation of abuse to both the spouse victim and the  
10 children who are the victims of domestic violence.

11 S 3. Section 1017 of the family court act is amended by adding a new  
12 subdivision 1-a to read as follows:

13 1-A. (A) IN DETERMINING WHETHER THERE IS A SUITABLE NON-RESPONDENT  
14 PARENT OR OTHER PERSON RELATED TO THE CHILD WITH WHOM SUCH CHILD MAY  
15 APPROPRIATELY RESIDE UNDER SUBDIVISION ONE OF THIS SECTION AND IF BOTH  
16 PARENTS ARE RESPONDENTS THE COURT SHALL INQUIRE AS TO THE FOLLOWING:

17 (I) WHETHER EITHER RESPONDENT SUFFERS FROM BATTERED SPOUSE SYNDROME  
18 AND IF SO;

19 (II) WHETHER SUCH BATTERED SPOUSE REPORTED THE INCIDENT PRECIPITATING  
20 A REMOVAL ORDER OR HEARING UNDER THIS ARTICLE AND IF SO;

21 (III) WHETHER SUCH BATTERED SPOUSE HAS BEEN NEGLECTFUL OR ABUSIVE IN  
22 THEIR BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE CHILD OR CHILDREN AT ISSUE.

23 (B) IF THE COURT SHALL DETERMINE UNDER PARAGRAPH (A) OF THIS SUBDIVI-  
24 SION THAT A RESPONDENT IS A BATTERED SPOUSE AND REPORTED THE INCIDENT  
25 PRECIPITATING THE ORDER OR HEARING UNDER THIS ARTICLE THEN THE COURT  
26 SHALL DEEM SUCH BATTERED SPOUSE A NON-RESPONDENT FOR PURPOSES OF THE  
27 REMOVAL ORDER OR HEARING; PROVIDED THAT, SUCH BATTERED SPOUSE IS NOT  
28 NEGLECTFUL OR ABUSIVE IN THEIR BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE CHILD OR CHILDREN AT  
29 ISSUE. IF THE COURT SO FINDS, THE COURT SHALL AWARD CUSTODY TO SUCH  
30 NON-RESPONDENT PARENT PROVIDED THAT SUCH CUSTODY IS IN THE BEST INTER-  
31 ESTS OF THE CHILD OR CHILDREN.

32 (C) THE COURT MAY CONDUCT IN CAMERA INTERVIEWS, BAR THE APPEARANCE OF  
33 THE RESPONDENT ABUSER OR TAKE ANY OTHER STEPS AS IT DEEMS NECESSARY  
34 WITHIN ITS STATUTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR  
35 NOT A RESPONDENT IS A BATTERED SPOUSE WITHIN THE MEANING OF SUBPARAGRAPH  
36 (I) OF PARAGRAPH (A) OF THIS SUBDIVISION.

37 (D) THIS SUBDIVISION SHALL NOT APPLY TO INSTANCES OF SEXUAL CRIMES,  
38 MURDER OR WHERE THERE HAS BEEN PRIOR INCIDENTS INVOLVING DISFIGUREMENT  
39 OF THE CHILD OR CHILDREN AT ISSUE.

40 S 4. Paragraphs (vi) and (vii) of subdivision (a) of section 1022 of  
41 the family court act are renumbered paragraphs (vii) and (viii) and a  
42 new paragraph (vi) is added to read as follows:

43 (VI) IF THE COURT SHALL DETERMINE, PURSUANT TO SUBDIVISION ONE-A OF  
44 SECTION ONE THOUSAND SEVENTEEN OF THIS ARTICLE THAT A RESPONDENT PARENT  
45 IS A NON-RESPONDENT FOR THE REASONS GIVEN THEREUNDER, THE COURT SHALL  
46 ISSUE A TEMPORARY ORDER OF PROTECTION AGAINST THE RESPONDENT ABUSER  
47 PURSUANT TO PARAGRAPH (V) OF THIS SUBDIVISION.

48 S 5. Subdivision (b) of section 1027 of the family court act is  
49 amended by adding a new paragraph (vi) to read as follows:

50 (VI) IF THE COURT SHALL DETERMINE, PURSUANT TO SUBDIVISION ONE-A OF  
51 SECTION ONE THOUSAND SEVENTEEN OF THIS ARTICLE THAT A RESPONDENT PARENT  
52 IS A NON-RESPONDENT FOR THE REASONS GIVEN THEREUNDER, THE COURT SHALL  
53 ISSUE A TEMPORARY ORDER OF PROTECTION AGAINST THE RESPONDENT ABUSER  
54 PURSUANT TO PARAGRAPH (V) OF THIS SUBDIVISION.

1 S 6. Subdivision (a) of section 1028 of the family court act, as  
2 amended by chapter 41 of the laws of 2010, is amended to read as  
3 follows:

4 (a) Upon the application of the parent or other person legally respon-  
5 sible for the care of a child temporarily removed under this part or  
6 upon the application of the child's attorney for an order returning the  
7 child, the court shall hold a hearing to determine whether the child  
8 should be returned (i) unless there has been a hearing pursuant to  
9 section one thousand twenty-seven of this article on the removal of the  
10 child at which the parent or other person legally responsible for the  
11 child's care was present and had the opportunity to be represented by  
12 counsel, or (ii) upon good cause shown, WHICH SHALL INCLUDE A FINDING BY  
13 THE COURT, AT ANY TIME IN THE PROCEEDINGS, THAT A RESPONDENT PARENT IS A  
14 NON-RESPONDENT PURSUANT TO SECTION ONE THOUSAND SEVENTEEN OF THIS ARTI-  
15 CLE. Except for good cause shown, such hearing shall be held within  
16 three court days of the application and shall not be adjourned. Upon  
17 such hearing, the court shall grant the application, unless it finds  
18 that the return presents an imminent risk to the child's life or health.  
19 If a parent or other person legally responsible for the care of a child  
20 waives his or her right to a hearing under this section, the court shall  
21 advise such person at that time that, notwithstanding such waiver, an  
22 application under this section may be made at any time during the  
23 pendency of the proceedings.

24 S 7. This act shall take effect immediately.