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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 21, 2012

TO: All House Members

FROM: Representative Louise Williams Bishop 

SUBJECT: Co-sponsorship request – Amending Title 23 (Domestic Relations) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, on divorce to provide for additional counseling for divorcing couples.

In the near future, I plan to introduce legislation that would amend Title 23 (Domestic Relations) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, on divorce to further provide for additional counseling for couples seeking divorce.

The divorce rate in the United States is the highest in the world. It is reported that fifty percent of marriages end in divorce. Divorce is one of the most traumatic events in a person's life. People experience loss of partner, hopes, dreams, and lifestyles. Divorce is associated with an increase in depression and anger. Anger is a normal emotion that most people experience at some point during the divorce process. It is not uncommon for divorced parties to experience outburst, negative comments, belittling, arguments, and even an exaggerated story about the other parties' shortcomings. What is not normal and should not be tolerated as a part of the divorce process is abuse. Many times during the divorce process feelings of anger develop into actions of abuse, which if left unassessed may lead to far more catastrophic incidents. One need only look at current events to find evidence of divorce situations that have resulted in horrible consequences as a result of anger not properly being assessed or managed.

In an effort to educate and protect all involved in the divorce process my proposed legislation would require counseling geared toward anger management as a part of the divorce process. Currently couples seeking divorce have the option or they may be mandated by the court to participate in a maximum of three counseling sessions within the 90 days following the commencement of the divorce action. This legislation would amend current law by introducing a subsection that would require, regardless of the grounds for divorce and addition to any other required counseling, a maximum of three counseling sessions to prepare divorcing parties to deal with anger management; be informed of protection from abuse; and educate divorcing parties on the effects of their behaviors on any child who resides with a person participating in a divorce procedure. It is my desire to provide all involved in the divorce process additional resources to assist them through, perhaps one of the most difficult transitions of their life, with the assistance of counseling.

If you would like to join me in co-sponsoring this very important legislation, please contact Heather Walsh at hwalsh@pahouse.net or by calling 717-783-2192.