

Dana Michelle Van Epps  
1695 Dunlap Roddey Road  
Rock Hill, South Carolina 29730

November 10, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

I am in hopes that this letter will somehow reach you. It is a long shot for me to think that the Governor would hear my story; however, I have been sharing it and trying to get someone/anyone to listen to me for a long time. I appreciate you taking the time to read my story if you do and I would also appreciate any kind or form of assistance.

I am a separated mother of three children, ages 11, 9 and 7. I was married to my husband for twenty years and fled for my life in January of this year. I married my husband at the age of 18 and endured 20 years of physical, emotional, mental, sexual abuse as well as his affairs, consistent vindictive behavior, manipulation, compulsive lying, gaslighting techniques and overall, complete control of my life. My children and I also endured multiple moves throughout the years from Rocky Mt., NC, Charlotte, NC, Green Bay, Wisconsin, Fort Mill, SC, Arizona, back to Green Bay, Charlotte, Rock Hill, SC, Edgemoor SC, Fort Lawn to Maryland and lastly Sneads Ferry, NC. Now he has moved back to Fort Lawn, SC and I had to move to SC in order to get my children 50/50. I learned to live in survival mode and lived in denial for most of the years throughout the marriage. My children were a blessing and a miracle to me; however, I never wanted them to know what I was going through. As they grew, I realized not only did they know anyway; they were tremendously affected by it and also learned to "walk on eggshells." I left in January in the middle of the night as I knew in my gut that I would not last much longer. I attempted to take my children with me; however, was threatened if I did so and he has always been excellent at following through with his threats. I proceeded to get in my car and made it 5 minutes from our home in North Carolina at the time. I had only the clothes on my back, the few clothes I could grab and no place to go as he had isolated me from all of my family and friends. I thought to return to try to figure out how to get my children safely and upon returning, my husband was on the phone with a woman from Indiana that he had met online. In a matter of 15 minutes after 20 years of marriage, he had already arranged for this woman to move into my home with my children the following day. I was told I could stay as well; however, I would go by his rules. He always told me that I was replaceable and that nobody would ever love me with three children as well as that he would destroy me if I left. I left the

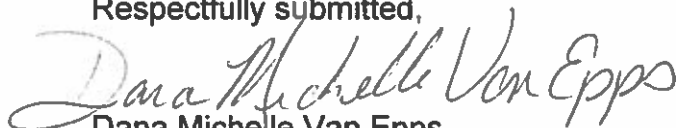
following day still unable to take my children and went back to my home of Rock Hill, South Carolina. He wrote a check to me for \$1000. Twenty years was worth \$1000. I lived from friend to friend and did not know what to do or where to start. I was an CNA and medical assistant; however, was never allowed to work or if I did; he would make me quit after so long due to jealousy issues or not wanting to care for the children. I went out and obtained three part-time jobs immediately in order to get started and fought from there. I reconnected with family and friends. With the help of my parents, I was able to retain an attorney within several months to fight for my children, to get them out of that environment that nearly destroyed me and that I knew would destroy them as well.

To make a very long story short, we did not go to court for custody/visitation in Onslow County, North Carolina until September 22, 2015 and the process started in March of 2015. From January of 2015 – September of 2015, I only got to visit my children a total of 5-6 times. He controlled everything and everything had to be on his terms explicitly. I even had to move from South Carolina where my jobs were, where my family was, again because he told me he would kill me if I remained there (as he was planning to return to South Carolina). I moved to Virginia and started over again with nothing. I had to deal with daily harassment regarding wanting to visit my children or even to talk to them via phone. I dealt with harassing texts accusing me of traveling and random lies for no apparent reason when in reality; he was doing these things. He even had my vehicle repossessed that was in his name before I left. He has tried to do everything and anything to destroy me financially and emotionally until he will physically. I dealt with the emotional scars, flashbacks, panic attacks, memory recall of events from our marriage and continued to fight to get my children. During this time period, I had to call Child Protective Services twice on my husband and his paramour (a different woman who moved in after weeks of meeting him online). One was due to my daughter reporting that his mother choked her (as she lived with him too). The second was a result of the paramour biting my daughter's arm so severely that bruising was left almost the size of a baseball with teeth imprints. The first complaint resulted in CPS in North Carolina providing services and getting the children in counseling. The second was unfounded. My children have told me (which I have recorded) that my husband bribed them to lie to CPS and that he told them that he paid their counselor \$5000 not to discuss the past because he would go to jail. I slowly watched and listened from afar, my children being brainwashed and turned into walking emotional zombies. At the court hearing in September in Onslow County, North Carolina; my attorney advised me to suddenly agree to joint custody with my husband on the condition that I relocate back to South Carolina. With being desperate, I agreed. I never returned to my home in Virginia nor my job. I moved in with my parents in Rock Hill and began getting my children every other week. I realized I had made a mistake when the school system would be chosen by him and was 45 minutes from my home. I would have to drive back/forth twice per day leaving me unable to work a full-time job while the children were at school. I learned that this was where he wanted me. I am having to live on government financial assistance while working a part-time job in order to survive because he has boxed me in. All the while, he is a contractor, makes a significant amount of money, was receiving

\$10000 per month from his father and received food stamps/Medicaid while in North Carolina. This was all documented in my attorney's deposition with him and reported to Onslow County DSS. However, nothing is ever done. His efforts at harassment, threats (although made very skillfully to avoid detection from anyone but me), would increase since I moved here in September. He would call the police to my parent's home my first day at work saying he didn't know where the children were even though they had just called him before I left. He would drive into my parents' driveway, shine his lights and leave. I tried calling the police and they responded. My 11 year old son told them that his father would kill me, had threatened to shoot me. Nothing was done. My three children sleep in the same room as me even though they have their own rooms due to their fear. They have significant behavioral and emotional issues due to what they have lived through and nobody will listen. Yesterday, CPS came to my home to interview my children. I thought they were coming because of a complaint I made on 11/2/15 where my 7 year old daughter reported that the paramour was showering with her and she was bathing my boys. They advised the complaint was on me and my father, who has Alzheimer's, and was regarding sexual abuse. I was simply dumbfounded. I have fought to find an attorney who understands domestic violence, who understands the sociopath that my husband is so we can return to court once it is established in SC courts. I have fought through the court system, the police, anywhere and everywhere to be heard. I was told in the Spring of 2015 when I called the police due to threats by my husband that I had to have three incidents prior to obtaining a protective order. Well by three, I may be dead. I may have my children every other week but what I didn't realize was that the abuse/control/manipulation/threats would not stop. My husband is a convicted felon with convictions across the country; however, he has money. His paramour is a recently convicted felon who has abused and still is living with my children. The emotional damage that is being done to my children on a daily basis is unbearable. I fear for my life daily. I fear for my children's lives every minute and fear that their emotional well-being will be beyond repair. I need help. I am desperate. I am tired. I am tired of fighting a system that values an abuser's rights more than mine and my children. No one hears me. All anyone hears is his money and manipulation. My screams fall on deaf ears and my voice is fading.

Thank you for your attention, if this ever made it to you. Thank you for any assistance, suggestions or help you can provide. I don't want to be another statistic for SC's domestic violence deaths. I don't want my children to be broken and damaged for the remainder of their lives.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dana Michelle Van Epps". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Dana Michelle Van Epps

(910) 545-3821