

*(duplication of letter from Gloria Steinem on the issue of women and child custody)*

January 12, 2005

I write this in support of Patricia Duff and others who are working to establish a NY State NOW Task Force on Domestic Law.

The National Organization for Women has always been in the leadership in past reforms and crucial struggles to make this law more gender free, supportive of children and families, and economically just.

We have reached the point in the practice of those reforms—and sometimes their misinterpretation to benefit the socially or economically powerful—when we must seriously assess again, and see where both the constructive and destructive forces are coming from.

For example, “the good of the child” is a fine standard, but it is too often interpreted as being served by the parent with greater earning power. Charges of child abuse in general, and child sexual abuse in particular, are crucial to investigate, yet the mere bringing of such a charge by the protective parent is too often used against that parent. The earning power of a parent is too often held to be more important than that person’s record of time spent with the child. Indeed, the value of work and care giving in the home is still far less than that outside the home.

As a result, I’m sure many of you have my experience of being presented with abuses of justice that require endless work to rectify, impose great suffering in the meantime, and should never have happened.

We must take another careful look, particularly in this state that is thought to be enlightened, but so frequently is behind other parts of the country.

The women’s movement, which provided leadership in past reforms and crucial struggles to make law more gender free, supportive of children and families, and economically just, must lead on the issue of family law reform.

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*Gloria Steinem*