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For Immediate Release

Coalition Calls Attention to the Fake Courtroom Diagnosis of Parental Alienation Syndrome by Refuting Alec Baldwin's Book

(September 30, 2008) Nashville, Tennessee – The Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (Coalition) has seen a growing trend in victims of domestic and sexual violence losing custody of their children to batterers due to a misperception called Parental Alienation Syndrome or simply alienation. **Victims of domestic violence are sincerely trying to protect their children from abuse or witnessing abuse; they are not trying to alienate children from their fathers.** Recently, there has been information about the fake courtroom “diagnosis” of Parental Alienation Syndrome in the media due to the release of Alec Baldwin’s book entitled, *A Promise to Ourselves*.

Parental Alienation Syndrome is not recognized by any professional association and has been rejected by the Presidential Task Force of the American Psychological Association and by the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges.

“Parental Alienation Syndrome” is a claim that has been used to suggest that some parents try to undermine their children’s relationship with the other parent, typically the noncustodial parent, by making false statements about that other parent, most often in the form of abuse allegations. In fact, actor Alec Baldwin made that claim about his own child custody case in a recent interview with Diane Sawyer.

The Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, along with the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DV LEAP), Stop Family Violence (SVP), and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, call on the media and the courts to rectify the misunderstanding and misuse of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) in custody cases.

“With the increased media attention surrounding the release of Alec Baldwin’s book, it is important to let the public know that victims of domestic violence are being silenced through the use of ‘parental alienation syndrome.’ We cannot afford to consign thousands of children to unsafe custody or visitation with abusive parents because family courts have come to believe that abuse allegations mean nothing more than a campaign of alienation,” said Sue Else, President of the National Network to End Domestic Violence.



T E N N E S S E E
coalition
A G A I N S T D O M E S T I C
& S E X U A L V I O L E N C E

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Victims of domestic violence face a surprisingly uphill battle in family court to win custody of and safety for their children. All too often, courts award custody and unsupervised visitation to parents found to have committed domestic abuse. Many courts handling custody cases do not understand the dynamics of domestic violence and fail to properly factor in the impact of abuse when considering the best interests of the child.

As part of a project entitled *Mothers Organizing for Children's Justice*, the Coalition recently conducted an anonymous survey and focus groups with survivors in Tennessee. The goal of the project is to utilize information from the surveys and focus groups to enhance the safety of battered women and their children by addressing issues in our systems.

In the Coalition's survey, 34% percent of the mothers who responded had been labeled as an "alienator" or with Parental Alienation Syndrome by a court related professional. Thirty percent of these women were advised by attorneys or other professionals involved in their case to not bring up issues of domestic violence, child physical abuse, or child sexual abuse, as it could negatively affect them and their children in the custody decision.

"The fact that women in Tennessee are being advised to not bring up domestic violence or child abuse strongly suggests that Parental Alienation Syndrome is being used to silence women and children into submission and continued abuse," says Kathy Walsh, Executive Director of the Coalition.

One mother surveyed said that, "I had full custody of the children, up until a couple of years ago when the court gave custody to the abusive father. There continues to be acts of abuse to the children from the father and the court refuses to hear testimony from the mother's side and from professionals who have met with the children."

"The pseudo-science of Parental Alienation Syndrome is clearly at play with this mother and her children. Dangerous allegations of Parental Alienation Syndrome are evident in Tennessee courts and we need to work together to support protective parents and children," says Kathy Walsh, Executive Director of the Coalition.

ABOUT THE COALITION

Formed in 1983, the Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (Coalition) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization composed of diverse community leaders and program members who share a common vision of ending violence in the lives of Tennesseans through public policy, advocacy, education and activities that increase the capacity of programs and communities to address violence. For more information, visit: www.tcadsv.org.



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ABOUT NNEDV

The National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund (NNEDV) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing public education, training and technical assistance to maintain and develop the professional expertise of advocates working to end domestic violence. NNEDV strives to strengthen advocates as organizers and activists in the tradition of social change movements. For more information, please visit www.nnedv.org.

ABOUT DV LEAP

The Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DV LEAP) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization which provides a stronger voice for justice by fighting to overturn unjust trial court outcomes, advancing legal protections for victims and their children through expert appellate advocacy, training lawyers, psychologists and judges on best practices, and spearheading domestic violence litigation in the Supreme Court. For more information, visit www.dvleap.org.

ABOUT NCADV

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization formed in 1978 to establish a national network of community based programs to assist victims of domestic violence. NCADV provides support to programs and state coalitions, technical assistance, public policy and community awareness campaigns to work towards the vision of every home a safe home. For more information, visit www.ncadv.org.

ABOUT SFV

StopFamilyViolence.org is an online national activist organization that works to organize and amplify our nation's collective voice against family violence. SFV activists raise their voice to ensure safety, justice, accountability, and healing for people whose lives have been affected by family violence. StopFamilyViolence.org is a project of The Tides Center, a 501© (3) non-profit organization. For more information, visit www.stopfamilyviolence.org.