

# Judiciary panel OKs a domestic violence bill

## *Protection of victims aim of SB317*

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A three-pronged bill to aid domestic violence victims is headed for the full Senate after winning the approval of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

SB317 by Sen. Robert Presley, D-Riverside, passed Tuesday on a 7-2 vote, with Sens. John Doolittle, R-Citrus Heights, and H.L. Richardson, R-Glendora, dissenting.

UNDER PRESLEY'S legislation, the addresses of domestic violence victims would be exempt from disclosure under the California Public Records Act. The law generally requires records of state and local agencies to be open for public inspection.

SB317 also would require counties to provide spousal abuse victims all records needed to prove eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits.

If the records are unavailable, the county would have to provide for the applicant's signature a statement establishing eligibility.

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—Lobbyist  
Susan Aguilar

Like four previous measures carried by Presley and signed into law, the bill also would increase the portion of marriage license fees devoted to funding domestic violence shelters. SB317 would raise the fee from \$19 to \$25.

Exempting domestic violence victims' addresses from public disclosure is de-  
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signed to protect victims from further harm by their abusers.

"PROPOSERS OF this bill assert that a dangerous, abusive spouse or cohabitant can now easily find the address of his victim and gain retribution," according to the committee staff analysis of the legislation. "This bill would remove from the public record the whereabouts of such a victim."

In an interview, Gretchen Huffman, secretary for the Select Committee on Children and Youth, said there have been cases in which the victim's address has been revealed "and the perpetrator gets retribution."

To collect AFDC benefits, current law requires applicants to provide birth certificates, insurance policies, income statements, bills and other information to show eligibility.

SB317 proponents contend domestic violence victims often leave their homes in emergency situations and do not think of collecting such documents.

IN ADDITION, according to the staff analysis, "When a person flees a violent environment, it is often dangerous or impossible to return to the home to collect these types of documents."

Proponents of the bill — including the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence and the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc. — contend the increased marriage license fee is needed because shelters are "overcrowded and underfunded," the analysis said.

It added, "Proponents state that this minor increase is quite reasonable considering the magnitude of the present domestic violence problem."

Presley said statistics from the attorney general's office show dramatic increases in domestic violence and homicide rates.

Susan Aguilar, lobbyist for the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office, added, "There is an incredibly close link between domestic violence and homicide rates. (They are) sometimes very inextricably linked."

THE LOCAL DISTRICT attorney's office supports the non-disclosure provision of the bill, said Aguilar, but has no position on the fee and AFDC aspects.

In opposing the bill, Doolittle focused on the marriage license fee hike. "Is domestic violence limited to married people?" he asked.

Doolittle said he opposed imposing the fee on married people "to fund all the activities that go on at these domestic violence shelters when 50 percent" of the clients are unmarried. He suggested as an alternative that the state "impose a statewide surcharge on building permits" to fund the shelters.

Aguilar responded, "We can't make the assumption" that half the women who use the shelters are unmarried. She argued society's need for the shelters should outweigh personal attitudes toward unmarried people who live together.

Kevin Aslanian of the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc., said the majority of women who use shelter services are married.