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Cornell Law Students Help Tompkins County become Fourteenth Locality to Declare Freedom from Domestic Violence a Human Right

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Ithaca, NEW YORK, Dec 08, 2014

On November 18, 2014, the Tompkins County Legislature unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing that freedom from domestic violence is a fundamental human right. Cornell Law School’s Global Gender Justice Clinic and Avon Global Center for Women and Justice, together with the Advocacy Center of Tompkins County, proposed the **resolution**, which acknowledges that “domestic violence is a human rights concern” and calls upon state and local governments to continue to secure this human right on behalf of their citizens.”

UPDATE: On December 8, the Ithaca Town Board passed a similar resolution, which had been proposed by the same three organizations.

Cornell Law Students
Carolyn Matos '15, Joanne Joseph '15, and Josh Baldwin '16

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In adopting the resolution, Tompkins County became the fourteenth locality in the nation and the first rural community to adopt such a resolution. In doing so, it joins a growing number of local governments, such as those in Albany, Boston, and Chicago, that have recognized that freedom from domestic violence is a human right. All of these resolutions have been passed in the last three years—evidence of fast-growing momentum in this nationwide movement.

Across the country, more than 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men experience rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner. Despite Tompkins County’s small size, there has been an average of 147 reported cases of domestic violence annually between 2010 and 2013. The number of unreported cases is undoubtedly much higher. In 2013 alone, the Advocacy Center of Tompkins County answered 2,055 calls on its domestic violence and sexual assault hotline and served 212 new survivors of domestic violence.

Recognizing the pervasiveness of domestic violence and its devastating consequences, the resolution affirms that domestic violence is a human rights issue that governments have a responsibility to prevent and address. “By adopting this resolution, Tompkins County has recognized that domestic violence is not just a private matter—it is a societal issue that requires a societal solution,” said Joanne Joseph '15, a member of the Global Gender Justice Clinic and one of the co-authors of the resolution. “The resolution also creates opportunities for shared strategies and collaboration in an effort to address this devastating human rights problem, which is both intensely local and deeply global.”

Looking forward, the Global Gender Justice Clinic and Advocacy Center hope to see the adoption of similar resolutions by other local legislative bodies, including the City of Ithaca Common Council and the Tompkins County Council of Governments.

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