

## Aldermen urge domestic violence training for hairdressers



*Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez talks to Ald. Nick Sposato (38th) Monday before testifying in favor of a resolution urging the Illinois General Assembly to mandate domestic violence training for hair salon professionals.  
Fran Spielman/Sun-Times*

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Clairol once hawked hair-coloring products with the catchy slogan: "Only her hairdresser knows for sure." The same might be said for the deep, dark secret of domestic violence.

The City Council Public Safety Committee on Monday approved a resolution urging the Illinois General Assembly to require 120,000 licensed salon workers to undergo a one-hour training course on how to recognize the signs of domestic violence and how to assist their clients in seeking help or notifying authorities.

Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, who is locked in a contentious Democratic primary, was a key witness.

She talked about the close relationship many women develop with their hairdressers and about how spending one or two hours in the salon chair can unlock what is for too many women the shame of domestic violence.

"The most significant challenge that we face when pursuing domestic violence offenders is a lack of participation from our very victims. Perpetrators of domestic violence rely on fear to continue their pattern of abuse. And many victims hide their wounds to protect themselves and their children from retribution," Alvarez said.

"In addition to physical attacks, psychological torment plays a large role in these abusive relationships. Domestic abusers routinely control many aspects of their victims' lives, including where they are allowed to go. A quick trip to the salon may be the only time a victim is in the company of others for more than a few minutes without their abuser present. And women tend to bond with their hairdressers, as I certainly know."

The state's attorney added, "If we can arm salon professionals with the tools to recognize signs of abuse and open lines of communication with victims, then I believe that we can help to rescue women from the shame and terror of an abusive relationship and, hopefully, save lives."

Kristie Paskavan, founder of the advocacy group Chicago Says No More, said she asked her own hairdressers how many times a client had brought up the subject of domestic violence.

"She indicated that, not only had someone asked her before, but that she probably has seen signs of domestic abuse but wasn't sure what to do or say," Paskavan said.

"While we're not asking someone to intervene, we certainly want to provide awareness and education so if someone does bring it up, that they can respond. Because of that trusting relationship and the fact that people do confide within that relationship, it's an appropriate place for education."

Three members of the Public Safety Committee are former Chicago Police officers, who know only too well the prison of domestic violence for battered women. They also consider those calls the most difficult, unpredictable and dangerous for police officers.

"Salons are places of comfort for women, as barber shops are for men," said Ald. Chris Tailaferro (29th), one of those former cops.

Another, Ald. Willie Cochran (20th), recalled responding to domestic violence calls that ran the gamut "from a slight push to finding a body." Cochran said he will never forget any of those chilling calls.

The resolution was championed by Aldermen Matt O'Shea (19th) and Marge Laurino (39th).

When Laurino stressed that she was not "looking for hair stylists to intervene" in a potentially volatile situation, Public Safety Committee Chairman Ariel Reboyras (30th) tried to lighten the mood.

Reboyras said he went to the hair stylist recently and, "he never asked me" about domestic violence. The chairman then joked about his thinning hair and receding hairline.

"I was in and out in five minutes," Reboyras said.