

Advocates Look at Violence Issues

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More than 100 law students, attorneys and social workers learned Wednesday (March 17) that defending domestic violence victims takes a common language between mental health professionals and attorneys. Presenters at the session included Tulane alumnus Richard Ducote, a nationally recognized child advocacy attorney.



Richard Ducote, left, a nationally recognized child advocacy attorney, talks with Wendy Hadfield, right, vice president of Tulane Law Women's Association, at a domestic violence conference held at Tulane. (Photo by Joseph Halm)

The Tulane Law Women's Association sponsored the continuing education event focusing on custody and divorce cases involving domestic violence, assessing a child custody evaluation and ethics of representing domestic violence victims. Other speakers were Tania Tetlow, director of the Tulane [Domestic Violence Clinic](#), and Becki Kondkar, a national expert on child custody cases with domestic violence concerns.

"You are literally saving lives when you do this work, but it is not easy," Tetlow said.

Ducote emphasized the importance of the landmark Louisiana legislation that he wrote, the Post-Separation Family Violence Relief Act. "It ties their hands ? judges can't grant custody to abusers because of this act," he said, describing the presumption against custody for litigants who are found to be perpetrators of family violence.

Speaking about preventing visitation with parents who have abused their own children, Ducote says, "You'd think that some of these things are obvious, and I think they are. But the court seems to struggle with these things. I get accused all the time of not wanting fathers to see their children or wanting to create conflict."

Presenters also encouraged professionals to make fully informed decisions for their clients and described the challenges faced in representing domestic violence victims. Ducote criticized family law courts for focusing on reducing conflict above all else, while Tetlow described the stigma victims can carry and how this affects victims' court cases.

Tetlow said, "For social workers, you'll hear a lot about the law and what victims can expect in the courtroom. Hopefully, you'll be able to understand the kind of complexities that your client faces in the legal world."

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