

Court Recognizes "Economic Abuse" as Type of Domestic Violence

7.25.16

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When one thinks of "domestic violence," the first (and perhaps only) thought that typically comes to mind is physical abuse. Indeed, this State's Prevention of Domestic Violence Act ("PDVA"), N.J.S.A. 2C:25-19, lists out eighteen (18) specific offenses that constitute domestic violence under the statute, and as one may expect, nearly all of them pertain to acts of physical abuse (e.g. assault, false imprisonment.) In a recent opinion, however, the court addressed the interesting issue of whether non-physical abuse, such as economic harassment and coercion, are also domestic violence that would warrant the issuing of a restraining order under the PDVA.

The case of C.G. v. E.G.,^[1] dealt with whether a permanent restraining order should be issued against the defendant husband for his interference with the plaintiff wife's employment. More specifically, the plaintiff, who had been collecting Social Security Disability, received an offer to return to her previous employment as a waitress. While there were no present allegations of physical abuse towards the plaintiff,^[2] the defendant, who did not desire that the plaintiff return to work, took steps to thwart her efforts to hold her new job. For example, the defendant would make repeated harassing phone calls to the plaintiff's place of work. He would also harass the plaintiff's boss and his wife, as well as spread malicious (and completely unfounded) rumors that the plaintiff was having an affair with her boss.

The court's analysis focused on whether the defendant's conduct could be considered harassment and/or coercion, which are both included in the PDVA's expansive definition of domestic violence. In sum, the court agreed that there was simply no purpose for the defendant's actions besides interfering with the plaintiff's employment and to improperly influence her not to work, and such as was domestic abuse under the PDVA. The court recognized that "[i]n the context of domestic violence, an ex-partner's acts of obstructing, interfering with,

or threatening to endanger one's job and economic stability can be as fear-inducing to a victim as physical abuse.”

Domestic violence of any kind is deplorable, and should be tolerated by any victim. The decision in C.G. express recognition that physical abuse is not a requirement to find domestic violence represents a positive trend in this State's approach to protecting victims of domestic violence.