Domestic Violence Awareness Program Focuses on Tech Abuse

"It is essential that lawyers, judges and court personnel recognize the potential danger that technology may play in the lives of survivors of domestic violence so that we can help survivors to fully escape abusive relationships," said Ian Harris, a staff attorney for the New York Legal Assistance Group who specializes in domestic violence cases. In late November, at the Supreme Court, New York County, Civil Branch, and in collaboration with that court's Gender Fairness Committee, he presented a comprehensive lecture on the subject.

- **1 out of every 12 women (8.2 million) and 1 out of every 45 men (2 million) have been stalked.**

- **Nearly 80% of stalking victims are women. Men comprise 87% of stalkers.**

- **Of women stalked by current or former partners, 81% were physically assaulted and 31% were sexually assaulted.**

Source: Department of Justice, 2001

"Technology can be used to protect victims of domestic violence who are trying to escape an abusive relationship," said Harris. "Unfortunately, abusive partners and ex-partners can also use technology to threaten, harass, stalk and manipulate a survivor of domestic violence. While all forms of abuse—physical, emotional, financial and psychological— need to be stopped, technological abuse can be one of the hardest to combat and potentially the longest lasting."

The three types of tech abuse he surveyed are telephonic, surveillance and computer/Internet. The first, telephonic, involves constant calls and hang ups or voicemails, nonstop text messages, spyware, sexting or spoofing (messages sent from a made-up e-mail address or faking the email address of another user). Cordless phone conversations also can be monitored and cell phones can be used as listening devices and be intercepted by scanners.

Surveillance, the second type of tech abuse, includes GPS tracking, remote cameras such as webcams, nannycams and spycams and social networking sites that ask you to check in (such as Yelp).

Computer and Internet abuse encompasses everything from revenge pornography to gaining access to email accounts and deleting messages, creating false virtual profiles on dating sites and gaining access without consent to social networking sites.

What should you do if a computer or Internet technology is being used inappropriately? Initially, the most important thing is to gather evidence, print out all evidence (IMs, text messages and emails) and remember to print emails with message headers (a list of

the servers and IP addresses from which a message originates). Take screen shots or screen captures of harassing information. Make certain that your IM-er saves messages.

New York state law prohibits eavesdropping, unauthorized use of a computer, computer trespass and tampering, tech stalking, unlawful surveillance, and tampering with private communications, all of which carry penalties of fine or imprisonment.

Deborah Kaplan, co-chair of the Gender Fairness Committee delivered opening remarks and Hon. Sherry Klein Heitler, then Administrative Judge for Civil Matters, First Judicial District, welcomed the group.