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Domestic abuse advocacy groups call for judge's resignation.

MINNEAPOLIS (Nov. 12, 2009) — The Hennepin County court monitoring organization, WATCH, is calling for the resignation of Fourth Judicial District Court Judge Stephen Aldrich following comments he has made disparaging the seriousness of domestic abuse, according to WATCH executive director Marna Anderson.

WATCH, which has monitored domestic abuse cases in the Hennepin County Courts for more than 15 years, has been joined in its demand by other Twin Cities domestic abuse advocacy groups. They include the Battered Women's Legal Advocacy Project and the Domestic Abuse Project, which has operated for more than 30 years. According to Anderson, this is the first time any of these groups has called for a judge's resignation.

"This is an unprecedented move for all us," said Anderson, "but this is one of those rare instances where other avenues of redress have failed and where action needs to be taken."

According to Anderson, a comment by Judge Aldrich at an Oct. 21 Family Court hearing prompted the decision to call for his resignation. During the hearing to amend an order for protection brought by a woman against her husband, Judge Aldrich stated, "I've been married 45 years. We've never considered divorce, a few times murder maybe."

Judge Aldrich's comment is especially disturbing in light of the number of women who are victims of domestic homicide in Minnesota each year, said Carol Arthur, executive director of the Domestic Abuse Project.

"Many women seek a protection order because they're fearful of being murdered or seriously injured by their partner," she said. "The last thing an abused woman needs to hear in this situation is a joke about domestic homicide."

According to WATCH, Judge Aldrich has a history of making similarly inappropriate comments. "WATCH has been monitoring hearings in Hennepin County courtrooms for more than 15 years, and we have observed many judges in action," said Anderson.

"Judge Aldrich's behavior on the bench sets him apart from other judicial officers in the Fourth Judicial District, and is in stark contrast to our expectations of a fair, respectful judiciary," she added.

Anderson noted that WATCH has provided Judge Aldrich with direct feedback about his courtroom demeanor, contacted his superiors in the District Court, and twice filed formal complaints against him with the Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards. None of these actions, she said, has resulted in improvements in Aldrich's behavior.

“We continually give feedback to judges as part of our role as court monitors, and most of the time, our feedback is well received,” said Anderson. “But Judge Aldrich is seemingly impervious to criticism and unable to recognize how his comments and behavior undermine the integrity of the court.”