

# Mother's Day deepens pain for women cut off from kids

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SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

PATERSON — On the eve of Mother's Day weekend, a small circle of women marched in the rain in front of the Passaic County Administration Building on Friday to protest government actions that separated them from their children.

To dramatize their parental loss, some demonstrators pushed empty baby carriages.

"I'm here trying to help my kids come back home," said Shamilka Spaulding, 23, of the Bronx. "My house is no longer safe for them because I was living in a DV situation."

"DV" means domestic violence. Spaulding was one of 20 demonstrators who all were residents of Strengthen Our Sisters shelters,

## Legal system unfair, abuse victims claim at Paterson protest

which provide refuge for battered women and their children. Sandra Ramos, the program's executive director, organized the protest.

Holding a waterlogged placard, Spaulding fought back tears as she recalled a three-year ordeal of being pistol-whipped and stomped on by her boyfriend, who, she said, often would lock her and the couple's three children in their home for as long as two weeks.

The boyfriend is currently in prison, she said, and their three children are in foster care. Spaulding said she is trying to gain approval from New York City's Administration For Children's Ser-

vices to get her children back by moving into one of the shelters of Strengthen Our Sisters, which has multiple Passaic County locations. Protest organizers said their point was that family courts have wrongfully awarded custody to well-financed fathers whose lawyers were somehow able to convince judges to turn a blind eye to their clients' domestic abuse records.

Mo Therese Hamlin, a psychology professor at State College in Loudonville, N.Y., has chaired the Battered Mothers Custody Conference for the last five years. She said there were thousands of abuse cases in which battered women were "re-abused" by family courts that awarded child custody to abusive spouses.

"You have a woman who needs  
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Patricia Mercado marching outside Passaic County Administration Building.

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