



LESLIE BARBARO/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Grimilda Caez of Wanaque pushing empty baby carriage during mothers' protest Friday outside Passaic County Administration Building.

Mothers: Protest separation from kids

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to get out of a marriage," Hannah said. "When they go through a family court system, they are also most immediately disbelieved."

Spaulding and a few other women admitted that they didn't fully understand the specific issue targeted by the demonstration.

But they did acknowledge that the only pain worse than what they endured at the hands of an abusive mate was the mental distress of being separated from their sons and

daughters on Mother's Day.

"I lost my children two years ago," said Kelly Depaola, formerly of Waldwick, whose three daughters and one son live with her ex-husband. Depaola said she was married for 12 years.

"I decided to leave him," Depaola said. "That's when he decided he would take the children from me because he knew it would kill me. It almost did."

Depaola said she tried to gain custody of the children without an

attorney, and lost. Her ex-husband, a painting contractor, had legal counsel.

Although she suffered abuse from her husband, Depaola said, he did not abuse the children.

Steven P. Monaghan, a family law attorney in Red Bank who has practiced for 15 years, said New Jersey family courts weighing custody rights consider child protection to be the most important issue.

"Issues of abuse, particularly molestation, are of paramount im-

portance," Monaghan said.

But Yercaira Murillo, 34, who used to live in Lake Hopatcong, remains frustrated by a judicial system that awarded custody of three of her children to a former spouse who she said abused her.

"We had an agreement that we would be sharing the parenting," Murillo said. "The judge granted him full custody. Now I'm going on six years that I haven't seen them."

E-mail: brubaker@northjersey.com