

I am here to share a personal and deeply challenging experience as a military member who faced domestic abuse and the subsequent consequences of seeking help. Ten years have passed since I last saw my youngest son—a consequence of standing up to my spouse's abuse and taking the courageous step to seek support from the Fleet and Family Support Center before filing for divorce.

On Thanksgiving 2014, a significant event unfolded. My spouse, who had recently returned from a suicide attempt and left a note acknowledging me as a good man, became enraged when I requested a simple glass of rum and coke with Thanksgiving dinner. What followed was a series of terrifying events. My spouse attempted to run me over with a vehicle, chasing me into the woods. Earlier that day, she had also attempted to stab me while holding our infant, all because of what she described as "verbal abuse." These actions, which she freely admitted to during court proceedings, were met with indifference by the military court martial convening authority, who stated that he lacked jurisdiction over her and had no interest in prosecuting her. She laughed about it, claiming that she was justified to stab because I had verbally abused her. In layman terms, because I raised my voice, she was now authorized to attempt to take my life. That is how out of hand that the situation had become.

Despite the severity of her actions, my spouse's dishonesty was evident. The Grayslake Police Department concluded that she was "not telling the truth" during one of her accusations (which is still different from lying somehow?). This incident involved her attacking me at a Starbucks during a custody exchange, witnessed by four men who stood up for me, even missing their college classes to do so. My spouse repeatedly made false accusations to NCIS, the base, my chief, and anyone who didn't comply with her demands. On legal advice, I agreed to her conditions, leading to multiple conflicting statements from her. She recanted her accusations when she realized I planned to leave her for another woman, only to later retract her retraction.

The abuse was severe enough that Navy Medical documented the injuries she inflicted on me, even calling her to leave a message about my abuse examination. Yet, what shocked me most was how quickly I was vilified. Despite nearly two decades of service with no notable incidents, I was immediately framed as the abuser. I was denied an advocate, while my spouse falsely accused me of assaulting her. These baseless accusations led to the loss of everything I held dear, including my son, without a shred of credible evidence.

Ultimately, I was incarcerated (pre-trial confinement) for nearly six months, during which I suffered a mental breakdown as the reality of losing my child to a mentally unstable individual overwhelmed me. Though I won in civilian court, the Navy refused to drop the protective order, despite regulations requiring them to do so once local jurisdiction took over. Trapped by a system that did not adhere to its own rules, I was told that the only way to see my infant was to comply with my abuser's demands. In the end, I faced administrative separation and was court-ordered to pay 110% of my pay to both of my spouses for "support and maintenance," under threat of imprisonment if I failed to pay more.

Despite overwhelming evidence in my favor, including the judge dismissing emails between us discussing the conception of our child because he "couldn't determine" who the child belonged to, I was still marched into a court martial. I was convicted for Domestic for physically stopping her during her suicide, I was convicted of post-penetration sexual assault for having a child with her that also came with written letters, cards, and plans for the conception of referenced child, and I was convicted of breaking an illegal protective order that had already been dropped by the court, but my real crime was seeking help from the Fleet and Family Support Center. Because I did not fit the preconceived narrative, I will likely never

see my son again until he is an adult. Meanwhile, my spouse, who only made accusations after learning of the divorce proceedings, has been able to extract thousands of dollars from federal, state, and local governments for the "pain" she claims to have endured while abusing me. She was able to take everything I owned. She was able to circumvent the divorce system by merely stating without any marks, "He hit me."