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SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Honorable Thomas Caltagirone
House Judiciary Committee
Harrisburg, PA

August 12, 2008

Re: House Bill 59

Dear Chairman Caltagirone:

For twenty years I have seen firsthand the life saving changes that battered women are able to make when support and advocacy are available to them. I have been the Executive Director of the Women's Center of Beaver County for twenty years now, and while I can tell you countless real life stories of how our services made a difference and saved the lives of women and children in our community, I can also tell you that I have seen our financial resources decreased and depleted instead of increase and grow. With this letter, I am offering written testimony in support of House Bill 59, which will provide new funding for domestic violence services and programs throughout the commonwealth. This funding is desperately needed if our services are going to be able to continue to help abused women and children, and abused men also.

Recently, I invited a woman to talk to our board of directors. She is a survivor in every sense of the word. When she came to the Women's Center a few years ago, she described herself as homeless and needing shelter. She and her son stayed in our shelter. Counseling helped her to disclose that her boyfriend was abusing her, however she returned to him and gave birth to a second son. Their infant son died from injuries consistent with a beating. She and her older son returned to our shelter. Only with the strength and courage that she was able to gain here, and with our advocacy and support, was she able to testify against the man that abused both her and her children. He is now in prison. She then lived in our transitional housing program for one year. She went to training, continued with counseling here, gained confidence and got a job. As she told her story to our board members, she said that she truly believes that without the support and services that she received at the Women's Center, she would not be alive today.

Funding for our program, the Women's Center of Beaver County has decreased by \$80,000 over the past five years. We have successful fund raising events and our community supports us, but it is not enough to make up for that amount of loss. Costs of maintaining our shelter, utilities, supplies, and paying staff salaries are increasing while our funding is decreasing. House Bill 59 will provide another source of revenue for domestic violence programs. Domestic violence programs provide a safe haven, counseling, advocacy, and prevention education programs in communities all over Pennsylvania so that we can stop the violence from spreading to the next generation. Please help us to do that by supporting HB 59.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jill Marsilio-Colonna, MS
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