

Senator Melanie Scheible, Chair
SenJud@sen.state.nv.us
Members, Senate Judiciary Committee
401 S. Carson St.
Carson City, Nevada 89701

Dear Chair Scheible and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to ask for your support of SB177, a bill that will increase the fee charged on every marriage license sold in the state of Nevada to benefit victims of domestic violence. The proposal is to increase the fee by \$25, raising the total cost for a marriage license to \$85 in Washoe County, and up to \$102 elsewhere in the state.

I serve on the Board of Directors of the Domestic Violence Resource Center. This organization was founded as the Committee to Aid Abused Women in 1977, becoming the first organization in the state to provide shelter to domestic violence victims and their children.

Our organization's mission statement is to "rebuild safe and hopeful futures for victims of family violence." Our staff and volunteers provide free, bilingual services to all who seek them; however, our program is located in Reno, and our clients are primarily from Washoe County.

I have chosen to support this organization because I believe that individuals experiencing domestic or intimate-partner violence face a unique set of challenges in addition to the frequently terrifying physical and emotional violence they endure. The pattern of control and manipulation that many of them have experienced truly impacts all aspects of their lives: their physical and mental health, their financial well-being, their self-esteem and much more. I believe that as a community, it is our obligation to do what we can to help these individuals become independent and self-sustainable, and to also work with the family unit to help end this devastating cycle.

I can attest that the staff and volunteers of the Domestic Violence Resource Center are successfully dedicating themselves to this work, and the following statistics tell a part of the story. During the last fiscal year, residential services (shelter and transitional housing) were provided to 348 individuals, for a total of 21,600 bed-nights. Overall, the organization served 10,677 contacts--individuals seeking services, resources, referrals, support with the Temporary Protection Order process and much more. Our services are accessible 24/7 and also include an emergency hotline, emergency clothing, food and transportation assistance, counseling, financial counseling and so much more.

As you might imagine, a full time staff of 10 would be hard pressed to provide all of the services that we do annually. Thankfully, in addition to our Board of Directors, we have a strong and committed volunteer corps who help us to meet our mission. Last year our volunteer numbers were decreased due to the pandemic (we reduced face-to-face volunteer hours to reduce potential virus exposure), but still, we utilized 6,949 volunteer hours during the course of the year.

Marriage-license funding is critical to help fund the operations of the Domestic Violence Resource Center. These funds provide great flexibility for our organization (unlike most governmental funding), and allow us to create and support the infrastructure needed to provide residential and non-residential services for our clients. Marriage-license funding also serves as a critically needed match for federal funding. In Washoe County there are three programs that provide domestic-violence services, and – even combined – they cannot meet the increasing need for services.

Since mid-March 2020, our organization and the other 13 programs providing domestic violence services in Nevada have worked tirelessly and creatively to continue to provide services during the pandemic. Requests for our services skyrocketed: during a six-month period in 2020 compared with the same period in 2019, the organization saw a 50% increase in the number of calls to the emergency hotline, an 81% increase in requests for Temporary Protection Order support and a 100% increase in the numbers of adults seeking emergency shelter. This data aligns with the increases seen statewide.

At the same time, funding from marriage-license sales plummeted due to a stoppage in travel to the state for weddings. Specifically, funding from marriage-license sales for our organization was reduced from \$319,348 in FY 20 to \$ 89,938 in FY 21. Fortunately, our team was able to work quickly to seek funding from other sources (pandemic-related funding, PPP loan, individual appeals to private foundations and major donors) to help sustain our operations. In December, 2020, the Division of Child and Family Services was able to provide an additional \$66,275 for our organization due to a rebound in the sales of marriage licenses at that time.

The marriage-license surcharge was increased in 2009 (12 years ago) by \$25. Since that time the population in the state of Nevada has increased by 500,000 – with a related increase in the need for domestic-violence services. On behalf of our clients, our staff and our Board of Directors, I encourage your support of SB177, and look forward to answering any questions you may have about this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Arnold Maurins
Member, Board of Directors
Domestic Violence Resource Center