



March 15, 2021

Senator Melanie Scheible, Chair
Members, Senate Judiciary Committee
Nevada State Legislature
Carson City, Nevada

Dear Chair Scheible and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express Sierra Community House's full support for Senate Bill 177.

Sierra Community House is the organization resulting from the July 1, 2019 consolidation of Tahoe SAFE Alliance, Project MANA, the North Tahoe Family Resource Center, and the Family Resource Center of Truckee. The mission of Sierra Community House is to connect and empower our community through family strengthening, crisis intervention, hunger relief, and legal services. We are a critical non-profit organization serving the rural North Lake Tahoe & Truckee communities in Western Washoe County, Eastern Placer County and Eastern Nevada County. We have been providing direct services to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse and other individuals in crisis since 1982 and became incorporated as a 501(c) (3) organization in 1985.

In Fiscal Year 19-20, 644 community members accessed domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and prevention services from Sierra Community House. This included 160 hours spent on our 24-Hour Community Helpline; 2,572 peer counseling sessions; 172 adult therapy sessions; and 449 child therapy sessions.

The degree of need in our region has been compounded by COVID-19. Our Crisis Intervention and Prevention Program responded to a 200% increase in Helpline calls (averaging 150 calls a month), particularly those related to mental health and basic needs. COVID-19 is exacerbating an already challenging housing market. Even prior to COVID-19, North Lake Tahoe faced a housing crisis due to a lack of permanent housing and rising housing costs. We are seeing an influx of home purchases and people relocating to the region. This is making the rental market even more priced out and difficult to navigate. A recent article by CNBC, "*We're running out of homes for sale, Lake Tahoe brokers say as tech workers flee Bay Area*" articulated this surge of property acquisition. Sierra Community House is concerned about the impact this is having on our most vulnerable community members. We have already noted trends of the community members we serve relocating out of the area, where they can access more affordable housing.

The indirect impacts on Sierra Community House due to COVID-19 are significant. The pandemic greatly expanded financial support provided to community members from Sierra Community House, which exponentially increased the workload of our fiscal and grants staff. Adapting grant and fiscal policies to continue funding for life saving services resulted in many

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dedicated hours. Most devastating was the cancellation of our two largest fundraisers originally scheduled for June and November 2020. We expected to raise an estimated \$520,000 from these events, filling a funding gap for programs and staff not covered by grants. Salaries for administrative staff and some direct service staff at Sierra Community House rely heavily on general fund dollars to maintain operations, and we now lack the main revenue sources (fundraising) to meet this need.

Marriage License funds provide a lifesaving service to Nevada community members experiencing domestic and sexual violence. The shelter-in-place orders have impacted victims of violence in a unique and dangerous way. As a state, we are just beginning to see the impact these necessary orders have had on victims and their children. Funding for shelter services is more important than ever as the demand for services increases. Additionally, federal funds through the Victims of Crime Act are expected to decrease in the coming years absent action by Congress to lift the cap on these funds. This expected decline will greatly impact service providers throughout the state in keeping survivors sheltered and safe. Increased Marriage License funds could alleviate some of this and allow shelters to remain operational.

We are grateful to the sponsors of SB 177, and the continued advocacy from the Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence. We urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support this important legislation and send a strong message to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Nevada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul Bancroft", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Paul Bancroft
Executive Director
Sierra Community House