

Honorable Members of the House Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 669

I am writing in support of HB 669, "An act creating a supervised visitation and exchange monitoring pilot program for two communities".

Safe Space, Inc. provides assistance to primary and secondary survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, with the goal of breaking the inter-generational cycle of violence. We serve Silver Bow, Granite, Deer Lodge, Powell and portions of Jefferson and Madison Counties.

We have seen a real need for such legislation in the past year with an increasing number of parental abductions during visitations. Working in the field of domestic violence we repeatedly see batterers using unsupervised visitation as an opportunity to further abuse of the mother through the children.

Safe Space provided services to over 661 primary and secondary victims in 2004. We provided 825 shelter nights and assisted 48 victims of sexual assault. That vast majority of women we housed, who had dependant children, were faced with custody and supervision issues.

Where there is family violence, batterers often re-victimize through custodial arrangements that are inadequate to protect the safety of children and non-offending parents. Studies have shown that domestic violence related fatalities occur most often after a separation has occurred and when the victim is attempting to get on with her life.

Supervised visitation and safe exchange of children is a crucial element of advocating for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. It is unethical to court order a woman to continuously subject herself and her children to this abusive and potentially dangerous situation without providing her the protection needed for her and her children.

In closing, I support HB669 and ask that you pass this important piece of legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tonya Geraghty
Executive Director
Safe Space