

March 21, 2005

EXHIBIT 8
DATE 3/23/05
SB 452

Chairwoman Rice
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

RE: SB 452

For the record my name is Tootie Welker. I am the executive director of a domestic violence/sexual assault program in Sanders County. We provide services to over 300 victims a year in a county that has been recognized by the state as having a high level of domestic violence based on population compared to other areas in the state.

I have been working with battered women and women who have been victimized for over 15 years. My program works very closely with our law enforcement and other community agency's on a local Coordinated Community Response to domestic and sexual violence. Our program provides for on-call advocates who can respond to the direct needs of victims nights and weekends when law enforcement is called to the scene of a domestic violence. This allows our advocates the opportunity to inform victims of their options immediately after the assault and before they are assailed with numerous phone calls from the perpetrator in jail swinging between apologies and promises of roses to threats and intimidations.

Prior to having advocates on-call, we would not learn of weekend incidents until Monday morning when we would receive the Notice of Victims Rights form faxed by the relevant law enforcement agency. By that time the window of opportunity had closed and frequently victims would no longer want to speak to an advocate and would therefore not know there were options available. Many programs, especially small rural programs do not have the staff available to provide on-call advocates. SB 452 would allow a window of opportunity for advocates to meet with victims to let them know their options without being coerced, threatened and manipulated by the perpetrator until he had been arraigned before the Judge. This bill adds another tool to the toolbox to help with victim safety and offender accountability. I sincerely hope you will give this bill a due pass motion.

Thank you for you time and attention.

Tootie Welker

