



M O N T A N A
COALITION AGAINST
DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL
V I O L E N C E

HB 476
Senate Judiciary
3/22/05

Bill No. 2
Date 3-22-05
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This is a simple bill. HB 476 raises marriage licenses fees by \$13 to create grants to two communities for domestic violence misdemeanor probation officers. PFMA's are routinely charged as misdemeanors, whether a partner was strangled or it's the perpetrator's 3rd, 4th, or 5th offense. However, only three counties in Montana have adult misdemeanor probation officers and they are buried in DUI's. What this means is that there are hundreds of PFMA offenders out there who have been given penalties and fines and counseling requirements, and basically, there's no one there to make them do it.

The grants will be administered through the Board of Crime Control, granted through a competitive process, and modeled after the program in Lewis and Clark county. The grants will require that the position be self-supporting within two years as a result of increased fine collection. The position was self-sufficient within two years in Lewis and Clark. Consider what that means in terms of the uncollected fines that is the current status quo. We do appreciate concerns about fee increases, but the source identified in this bill is a common funding stream for domestic violence services in other states. The marriage license fee has not increased in MT since 1981, that's 24 years.

Although we focus on fine collection to stress the ability of the this system to be self-supporting, it is also important to recognize that offenders will also be held accountable for other parts of their sentences such as counseling. This can only be good for individuals, families, and society. Most importantly, it may reduce repeat offending and save lives. According to the Domestic Violence Fatality Report, Lewis and Clark county is the only one of the seven major counties in the past four years not to have a domestic violence fatality. It is also the only county during that time that had a misdemeanor probation officer for domestic violence offenders

We urge your support on HB 476.

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