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Date 3-22-05
HB 476

MONTANA
COALITION AGAINST
DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL
VIOLENCE

March 22, 2005

RE: HB476

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee Members:

The Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is a member-based organization that represents over 50 domestic violence direct service programs from throughout the state. One of our members, the Violence Free Crisis Line in Kalispell, is a partner to a grant project funded by the Montana Board of Crime Control to provide a compliance officer for tracking Partner Family Member Assault (PFMA) offenders in Flathead County. I spoke with Susan Schwarz from the Violence Free Crisis Line yesterday and she asked me to tell the committee about the success of their program.

Ms. Schwarz, who sits on the Flathead County Compliance Project's advisory board, stated that their compliance officer, Sandra Penrod, is currently monitoring 84 PFMA offenders. The program has been in place for a year and has met all its objectives. The compliance officer has developed relationships with the Batterer Intervention Programs (BIPS) and most of the courts in Flathead County, including the Justice Court, Kalispell Municipal Court and District Court, which means she can readily refer an offender back to the court for sentence revocation if the offender is out of compliance. She meets with offenders at least once a month for a long appointment to assess their compliance with their sentences, and they check in with her weekly. All 84 PFMA offenders currently being monitored are in compliance with their sentencing, an amazing fact that attests to the program's effectiveness.

Ms. Schwarz also noted that the program has increased coordination between different parts of the justice system that deal with PFMA offenders. For example, overdue PFMA fines are being collected at a higher rate than before, because the compliance officer now monitors fine payment. Ms. Schwarz said, "I believe (the program) has added an additional level of safety for victims of domestic violence. The compliance program advisory council is looking forward to expanding the program to cover courts in Whitefish and Columbia Falls. We think it is important that domestic violence offenders recognize their actions are criminal and serious, and we strongly urge the committee to pass HB476 so other communities can implement similar programs."

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Sincerely,

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