EXHIBIT 6
DATE 3-9-07
HB 240

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca

To: Representative John Sinrud, House Appropriations Committee Chairman
From: Cindy Weese, YWCA Missoula Executive Director
Date: March 9, 2007
RE: HB 240

Each year, Montana's charitable organizations use motel & hotel rooms to provide a safe place for individuals who have been temporarily displaced from their homes. Organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army depend on lodging facilities to help house families who have lost their home because of natural disasters. YWCAs and other domestic violence programs use motels/hotels when their shelters are full and when they serve male victims of domestic violence.

We can look to the past year for an estimate of how often these organizations rely on motels/hotels to help individuals and families in dire need. In 2006 the Red Cross provided approximately 340 motel nights for individuals and families who were displaced from their homes. The YWCAs in Billings and Missoula together used motels 90 nights last year (It's important to note that due to lack of funding the YWCA Great Falls was unable to turn to other lodging facilities, and therefore they were forced to turn away women and children fleeing violent homes when their shelter was full.) The Salvation Army also serves victims of natural disaster and domestic violence, but on a smaller scale than the other organizations. In addition to these large statewide organizations, there are approximately 26 other domestic violence programs located in the smaller communities such as Plentywood, Dillon, Glendive, Libby, and tribal towns like Lame Deer. Some offer a fulltime shelter facility, but many lack the capacity to operate a shelter, or are located where the client need is too small to warrant opening a shelter. These organizations currently use motels/hotels to provide emergency housing for families, or they transport the clients to another community that does have a shelter. Motel/hotel lodging is expensive, and moving clients to another town removes the survivors from their home community and their support system.

In talking with the Red Crosses, Salvation Armies, and YWCAs I've discovered that we all track the number of times that we use motels/hotels, but none of us track the number of times we turn away individuals in need of other lodging facilities. A conservative estimate is that we have to turn away at least two people for every one person we serve. Without the exact data it is difficult to determine how many people would be served by all the organizations if this legislation is adopted, but I can tell you the impact this bill could have on just one family. This year the YWCA Missoula served a man and his daughter who was referred to us by the police department after his wife was arrested for partner and family member assault. The man was a survivor of domestic violence and a stay at home dad, and he had just $24 in his pocket, but he knew he had to get his daughter away from her abusive mother and he had nowhere else to turn. We put him in a motel room for four nights, and on the fourth day he came into our office to thank us for giving him the time to pound the pavement while his daughter was in school so he could apply for jobs and contact family members who lived out of state who sent him money to get by on until his job started. Those four days gave him a chance to escape a violent home forever. This legislation could have that same impact on families across the state every day.

I urge you help us help individuals and families in need by voting in support of HB240.