



Domestic and Sexual Violence Services

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May 12, 2020

To: Law and Justice Interim Committee
From: Domestic and Sexual Violence Services of Carbon and Stillwater County
Re: Montana Board of Crime Control

Good morning committee members, my name is Kelly Heaton, Executive Director for Domestic and Sexual Violence Services. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about our organization and the funding relationship with the Montana Board of Crime Control. Founded in 1999 on a belief that everyone deserves healthy relationships, DSVS provides free and confidential support to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Carbon and Stillwater counties with offices in Red Lodge and Columbus. We are also focused on violence prevention through our program, Power Up, Speak Out, which teaches middle school students the basics of healthy relationships. We are the only community based advocacy organization in our two county, nearly 4,000 sq. mi. service area. We have been MBCC grantees for over 12 years and last year we celebrated our 20th year of service. MBCC grants, along with other funding, have allowed us to provide comprehensive, high quality, holistic services to over 2,400 families to escape violence and start new violence free lives.

Last year, although we received one of the highest overall scores on our grant proposal, our funding request was cut in half with little explanation. I then spent at least 40 hours, including a trip to Helena to physically attend a board meeting, appealing and fighting for funding that would allow DSVS to maintain current operations. I was able to secure approximately 80% of the amount requested and this resulted in less financial support for clients, serving less clients, and our advocate only able to work ¾ time. Many other programs did not fare as well even though most followed all of the rules and guidelines in the RFP. The MBCC board has seemed to make a shift in their funding priorities to include a wider diversity of grantees. Or perhaps they don't fully understand the history and importance of their essential funding to victim service providers.

The grant application process earlier this year has yielded a similar frustrating result. In the RFP released in December 2019, it was noted that 10% of the funding would be set aside for "New Programs, Legal Services, and Innovative Services." We submitted a grant that proposed funding for two innovative services and both met all of their criteria. We were the ONLY program to present "Innovative Services". Instead of receiving full funding, the MBCC ARC committee has recommended funding for all portions of our budget except the support directly related to the Innovative Service programs. This is a perfect, and continuing example, of how the MBCC ARC committee and Board have given mixed messaging and are not operating with a set of standards or evaluation criteria.

Our mission is to empower those impacted by violence and foster healthy relationships.

For years the funding distributed by MBCC has been the lifeblood of victim service programs. The decisions made by the board of directors have large impacts on the program itself and the victims we all serve statewide. As one of these programs, I speak for all when I say we need predictability and consistency and for the Board to focus on core victim services. To that end I would respectfully request three things;

1. Legislation that prioritizes funding to traditional victim service programs. Many programs across the state rely solely on MBCC funding. Continuing to divert funds away from legacy victim service programs and expanding the breadth of programs funded could be extremely detrimental to victims statewide, a very vulnerable population further exposed.
2. Create a seat on the MBCC Board for a traditional victim services provider. As drafted last week by this committee, HJ31-1 defines the board composition as representatives of state and local law enforcement and criminal justice partners directly related to the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency including local government, public agencies, citizens, and professional and community organizations that reduce and control crime. I humbly ask this committee to add representatives from traditional or legacy victim service programs to that list. It seems prudent to have voices at the table that are serving victims in response to crimes committed against them. This addition would ensure the board is grounded in the experiences and needs of victims.
3. Increase public accessibility to the MBCC decision making process by requiring board meetings to be subject to Montana's open meeting requirements. This includes properly noticed meetings, ensuring access to meetings both in person and through technology, ensuring meeting materials are available for review, and that minutes are published and accessible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Heaton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kelly Heaton
Executive Director
Domestic and Sexual Violence Services-Carbon and Stillwater County

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