



SB #150

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Proponent

My name is Amanda Meyers and I am the Executive Director of the Wichita Family Crisis Center, which for brevity, I will refer to today as “WFCC.” Our mission is to eliminate domestic violence in our community by supporting survivors through shelter, education and advocacy.

Violence against women and children has reached epidemic levels. One in four women will be the victim of severe physical domestic violence in her lifetime - that is more than breast cancer, ovarian cancer and lung cancer combined. Severe physical violence is defined, but is not limited to, being kicked, beaten, choked, burned or having a weapon used against a victim.

WFCC houses one of only two emergency domestic violence shelters in Wichita. WFCC’s shelter, unlike a typical homeless shelter, is in a confidential, undisclosed location to prevent abusers from finding their victims. The total domestic violence shelter space in Wichita consists of approximately 60 beds. The population of Sedgwick County is approximately 500,000, approximately one half of which are women. This means that 62,500 women have been or will be abused. 80-90% will flee with their children. Sixty beds are not enough.

In Wichita, we have seen a dramatic increase in the demand for shelter and services. In 2018, we served nearly 1,700 victims of domestic violence in our community, a 30% increase from the previous year. In fact, WFCC turns away between 40-50 victims and their children a month due to lack of capacity. And, each day in Kansas, there are at least 421 unmet requests for domestic violence services, a 20 year high. And as you may know, domestic violence homicides doubled in Kansas in the last recorded year which is the highest rate in over 20 years and the second highest rate of domestic violence homicides on record in Kansas.

Domestic violence is not only pervasive and increasing, it also creates a plethora of obstacles to economic opportunity. Financial abuse occurs in 98% of all domestic violence cases. The

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number one reason domestic violence survivors stay or return to the abusive relationship is because the abuser controls their money supply, leaving them with no financial resources to break free. Abusers prevent their victims from working outside the home and getting an education. They attempt to control every aspect of a victim's life in order to keep her completely powerless. Therefore, when victims of domestic violence and their children finally flee their abuser, they often arrive at the WFCC with no belongings and no identification let alone options for housing, transportation or employment.

In addition to my work as the Executive Director, I am also an advocate. My client, I'll call her "Annie" to protect her confidentiality, has three children under the age of 6. Early last summer, her husband broke down the door of her apartment trying to kill her. He savagely beat her in front of her children before the police arrived and arrested him. She was evicted from her apartment as a result of the damage her husband did to the apartment and because the landlord felt that the police involvement that saved her life was "disruptive" to the other residents. She resided in our shelter with her children until she was able to find safe, affordable housing.

Annie's story is not unusual. Domestic violence victims make up more than 10 percent of all evictions and more than 25 percent of housing denials because of the crimes committed against them. In fact, at our agency, we keep a list we call "Landlords who take Evictions" because we have so many clients who have records of evictions as a result of domestic violence incidents and they struggle to find housing.

Safe, affordable housing is one of the biggest barriers for clients as they rebuild their lives. And it is exponentially more difficult for survivors to find housing with a record of eviction. In fact, domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness among families nationally. As a result, we have clients who are afraid to call the police when they are abused because they are afraid they will be evicted as a result.

If we could move clients in to safe housing more quickly and keep them from being evicted as a result of domestic violence, we would free up space in our shelter for other women and children fleeing violence and abuse, victims we have had to turn away.

In sum, preventing domestic violence victims from evictions will have a real impact on women and children I work with every day and will increase my agency's capacity to shelter victims, allowing more victims and their children to get and stay safe.

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By the way, twenty people are victims of intimate partner violence every minute. This means that forty or fifty women experienced domestic abuse in the time it took me to give you this information. Thank you for your time and attention to this important bill.

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