

October 25, 2011

Topeka City Council
215 SE 7th, Room 255
Topeka, KS 66603-3914

Dear Council Member:

We are writing on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP). Our Board voted unanimously to register with you grave concerns it has with the City Council's decision to repeal the city's law that makes domestic violence a crime. We understand that the City Council took this step in response to District Attorney Chad Taylor's announcement that his office would no longer prosecute misdemeanor domestic violence cases because of budgetary cuts, thereby placing an added financial burden on Topeka, which the council felt it could not bear. We are pleased that the D.A. reversed his decision, but we remain concerned, especially because it is precisely during periods of economic hardship that domestic violence increases. As social scientists and as an organization focused on the study and resolution of social problems, including domestic violence, we hope that in the future the city and state will avoid making cuts in an area where the impact on victims, disproportionately women and children in the case of domestic violence, and the community at large, is so severe morally, psychologically, and economically.

Our position on this issue is based not only on moral and human rights grounds, but on sound social science research as well. Approximately 22 per cent of women report that they have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner at some point in their life. In addition, over one million women are stalked by their intimate partners each year. And while women can request a restraining order from the courts, most women who receive temporary restraining orders report that the majority of intimate partners violate those orders. These crimes – the ones that are often categorized as misdemeanors – can easily escalate into much more serious crimes if left unpunished. The cycle of violence, in which the frequency and severity of violence against an intimate partner increases over time, has been well documented since the late 1970s. The result of the cycle of violence is that women are victims of 80 per cent of all spousal homicides. Without stemming violence at the misdemeanor level, more serious incidents of intimate partner violence are inevitable, which in turn places innocent bystanders, often children, at risk as well. Not only is the literature on the subject clear about the frequency and seriousness of this crime, it is clear as well on the importance of sending a clear and consistent message against domestic violence.

Our failure to do what we can to reduce dramatically domestic violence has implications not only for the safety and health of victims and their loved ones, but for the larger society as well, both morally and economically. What the city saves in not prosecuting these cases, it and the country will pay in other ways. A 2003 study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that the cost to the U.S. economy of domestic violence was nearly \$6 billion annually. Other studies

placed the figure closer to twice that amount. Direct costs include healthcare services, welfare services, counseling, police services, transportation costs, and housing and other refuge and related services used by women and their children. The CDC estimated that the annual cost of healthcare services to treat domestic violence victims in the U.S. exceeds \$4 billion. Domestic abuse victims use health services more frequently than non-abused women. An indirect cost is lower productivity and absenteeism by abuse victims. The CDC estimated that abused women in the U.S. missed nearly 8 million days of paid work in a single year or *the equivalent of 32,000 full-time jobs*. Abuse victims have higher turnover rates as well.

We are equally concerned with the impact of domestic violence on the children of the victims. The children of abused victims are more likely to suffer from psychological and other trauma that can be long lasting and which will have to be addressed and paid for by cities, states, and federal governments. Domestic violence has an adverse effect on the educational outcomes of these children. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that children subjected either directly or indirectly to domestic violence were more likely to under-perform in school, have behavioral problems, drop out, and become juvenile delinquents. In other words, what may appear to be a savings is in fact a cost much greater than if the original cut had not been made. Morally, we have a responsibility to protect one another, but especially the most vulnerable among us.

Research tells us that partner violence crimes (both misdemeanors and felonies) must be prosecuted early and consistently to end the violence and ensure the safety of victims and their family members. We urge the City Council to reconsider its position to repeal its domestic violence laws. In addition, we urge the Topeka City Council, the Shawnee County Commission, and the Shawnee District Attorney to craft a coordinated community response, through which they can develop a viable, affordable, and comprehensive plan that supports the victims of intimate partner violence and prosecutes perpetrators of intimate partner violence (see for example, http://stopvaw.org/Coordinated_Community_Response.html).

If you wish to discuss our concern either by phone or in some other manner, please do not hesitate to contact us (hector.delgado49@gmail.com or 909-593-3511, extension 4475). Several of our members are experts on this issue and will be more than happy to share their knowledge with you. Targeting the prosecution of domestic violence for cuts is especially troublesome because it sends the wrong message about the seriousness of a crime that we as a society have not addressed adequately for too long and for which we, as individuals and as a society, pay a substantial social and economic price.

Sincerely,



Wendy Simonds, Ph.D.
President of the Board of Directors



Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
Executive Officer