

February 18, 2019

Good afternoon, I am Tracey Gay, Director of Client Services for the Wichita Family Crisis Center. The primary mission of the Wichita Family Crisis Center is to eliminate domestic violence in our community by supporting survivors through shelter, education and advocacy. In 2018, we served nearly 1,700 victims of domestic violence in our community, a 30% increase from the previous year. Our shelter operates at 99% capacity year round, and the safety of survivors is our biggest priority. Domestic Violence related homicides continue to rise in the state of Kansas, and we are looking at all avenues to determine, how we as a community, can do better to protect our survivors and hold abusers accountable. The Wichita Family Crisis Center works closely the Wichita Police department to follow a Lethality Assessment Protocol. This assessment determines the level of risk a survivor is in, at the moment police arrive on the scene. In 2018, we had 363 high lethality calls. In all cases, the abuser was either taken into custody or had a pick up issued for their arrest. A majority of the callers said something along the lines of “my abuser was arrested I am safe”. The unfortunate thing is, that their “safety” wasn’t a sure thing. Those victims had no knowledge if their abuser was going to come back to the house after 4 hours, 6 hours or 18 hours. Having release timing information is critical for victims to make decisions that could impact their safety. A victim’s decision could go from “My abuser was arrested, I don’t need shelter and I am safe” to “I have 3 hours to pack what I can, get my children, and get to your shelter, how can you help me”.

There is no greater impact on the safety of survivors than knowledge. The knowledge to make decisions in a moment of crisis that could potentially save their life. Knowledge is Power.

House Bill 2279, sponsored by Representative Victors, is an incredible bill that will give us an opportunity to increase knowledge of timing of abusers being released from custody, and therefore may increase the safety of survivors.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today, share service information from the Wichita Family Crisis Center, and support HB 2279.