

February 28, 2008

**STATEMENT OF BRENDA
ON THE NEED FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES**

To the Human Services Committee,

My name is Brenda and I am a domestic violence survivor. I am a single mother of two teenage daughters. In July 2007 it was my time to leave my abuser after numerous attempts. I finally decided to get the help I needed to keep my daughters and my self safe and free from abuse. I took the first step by calling the national hot line number to speak with someone on what my choices were. After speaking with them I realized it would be best for me to go to a domestic violence shelter. I live in Massachusetts and after calling Safe Link I was told of a shelter in Connecticut where I could go safely with my children. I was skeptical but decided it was the best thing for me. I got together some of our things and decided to take my girls to Connecticut.

When I spoke to the staff at Interval House in Hartford, I was scared. The staff talked to me and made me feel like my family was important, they made me feel like I had a choice, but most of all they made me feel something I hadn't felt in a long time. They made me feel safe again. I was given direction to where I was going and as I was on my way I got scared again. I thought I was lost and it seems as though I had been driving for hours. I called again and once again, the staff made me feel at ease and stayed with me on the phone until I reached my destination, a place I would call home for the next three and a half months.

Upon arrival I was greeted by staff who welcomed me and my children. They made sure to get the children settled in and a bit comfortable so that I could talk to them and explain what had been going on at home. After speaking with staff I was introduced to other shelter residents and given a tour of the shelter and then to my room.

During my stay, the staff were a big part of my life. I remember the first night I was there I couldn't sleep and went to the office to speak with the overnight staff. I was scared and confused at the same time. I remember her sitting with me for hours talking and assuring me that I was making the best decision for me and my girls. I felt like she understood how I felt, she assured me that I was safe and that staff would be there to help me through everything I needed help with. My first days were tough; I was very needy and always needed to be reassured I was doing okay. My daughters were met by a child advocate who helped them feel at ease and more comfortable with what was going on. On a daily basis staff met with me to make sure I was okay and they did safety planning with me. There were days I wanted to just return to my abuser, bad days where I felt I was ruining my girls lives, what was I doing? I was feeling the same as every other abuse victim, scared of the unknown.

There were times when I wanted to leave the shelter and just return but staff sat with me and explained what I was going to go back to, they asked if I had a safety plan and what was it, and as I spoke I changed my mind realizing I was in the best place at the time for my family's safety.

Things settled down for me and I began my new life. I met with staff on a daily basis and planned my new life. We had support groups, house meetings, and one on ones every week. I

learned that I was independent again and I didn't need anyone to make decisions for me, staff showed me how to be somebody, someone who mattered, someone who had a purpose.

Without the 24 hour staffing I don't know if I could have gotten through things on my own. They were very informative and supportive whenever I needed them. I finally felt that someone understood me and knew how I felt. I finally was able to make decisions on my own and wasn't afraid of repercussions. I was doing what was best for me and my daughters. I didn't feel alone anymore, I felt I had the power I had longed for.

Without the help of Interval House staff and their support throughout everyday of my stay I wouldn't be as strong today as I am. I have learned so much and I am a strong woman today. And for today I will not be an abuse victim, I will be a strong independent woman who deserves to be heard and recognized for who I am.

Thank you for listening to my story and know that abuse victims are fragile and need support at all times. When you wake up in a different place not knowing where you are or who the people you are with, knowing that there is a staff member is there to make you feel at ease makes all the difference in a woman's life.