February 11, 1992

Board of Directors
Domestic Violence Project
P.O. Box 3017
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

Dear Directors:

This letter to the board of directors is written with a great deal of circumspection. We have been strong supporters of the Domestic Violence Project, contributors to the Domestic Violence Project and personally supportive of Pat Meyer's work in the community. We must now bring a matter before the board and to the public in order to secure the safety of Barb Larpenter and to request an honest and patient dialogue about certain operations and practices of the Domestic Violence Project. Barb Larpenter's affidavit is attached. It speaks for itself and we urge you to read it before proceeding to read this letter.

Barb Larpenter has received services from the Domestic Violence Project and has been recognized by the Domestic Violence Project for her volunteer work. In February, 1991 she was named volunteer of the year. She is now afraid for her safety and believes that the project's staff, policies and position in the community pose a threat to her which cannot be remedied without judicial or public intervention. Barb Larpenter also seeks to address some fundamental policy issues about the shelter's operation and its participation in the apparent nationwide effort to hide women and their children from fathers who have a rightful claim of custody.

Barb Larpenter originally sought protection with the Domestic Violence Project to deal with her fear of harm from her husband. The ironic thing is that Barb Larpenter now fears harm from what she perceives to be powerful and vengeful employees of the Domestic Violence Project. Barb has received a package delivered to her doorstep in a threatening manner. Her son has received a telephone call from a woman who whispered to him, "I'm going to get your mother." Barb Larpenter has also been followed by a car which she believes belongs to a person who has a strong personal connection with Beth George (Kathleen Ruddell), an employee of your project.

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Board of Directors
Domestic Violence Project
February 10, 1992
Page 2

After reviewing the matter with her we believe that the only recourse is to bring the whole matter into public debate and ask the board to take firm, unequivocal and direct steps to protect Barb Larpenter from any retaliation, threats of harm, or harm for her actions to expose Beth George and her relationship to the Domestic Violence Project. We considered the possibility of seeking a court ordered injunction, but believe that there is greater protection for Barb Larpenter if the Domestic Violence Project in fact implements the principles it espouses for the safety its clients.

Barb Larpenter's secondary reason for approaching the Board is to engage the Board and the public in an honest and patient debate about the quality and focus of the Domestic Violence Project programming. She raises policy and program issues which have profound impact upon your program and its function in our community. While not intending to limit or frame the Board's own inquiry and debate over the issues raised. We suggest that there are several significant issues raised by her affidavit:

1. Whether the Board of Directors, the director and the staff acted improperly to provide shelter, financial support and service support and active participation in efforts to hide a woman wanted on criminal charges in regard to keeping her children from their father who has lawful custody.

2. Whether the director's and staff's actions are particularly inappropriate under these circumstances where Beth George did not claim any type of physical abuse or fear of physical abuse.

3. Whether actions of the director and staff affronted normal standards of the best interests of these children so as to put these children at significant risk of psychological and emotional harm.

4. Whether policies and orientations of the shelter program should be changed to make the program more available to a large socio-economic class of persons who experience violence in their domestic relationships.

5. Whether the physical facilities and the programming within the shelter is inadequate, requiring prompt remedy.
Board of Directors  
Domestic Violence Project  
February 10, 1992  
Page 3

6. Whether the direction of the shelter program needs to be re-examined in its entirety.

7. Whether there is neglect of children within the shelter which is not appropriately and properly dealt with by shelter policies and/or referral to public authority.

8. Whether the discretionary use of funds permitted to the director needs to be subject to greater audit and scrutiny by the board to prevent what was done and is being done on behalf of Beth George.

9. Whether clear statements of policy and practice are needed in order to avoid a recurrence of this situation and to restore confidence in the Domestic Violence Project by important elements of our community, such as law enforcement.

10. Whether some personnel changes ought to occur.

While Barb Larpenter's affidavit raises substantial issues for discussion and debate, our primary purpose for writing and bringing this matter public is to assure Barb Larpenter and her children an atmosphere where she is free from fear of retaliation and harm. She acted correctly and did what we would request every good citizen to do. She did what we would request every person concerned about the welfare of children to do. She did what we would request every woman who seeks services from the Domestic Violence Project to do. She told someone.

Barb Larpenter has authorized me to provide copies of this affidavit to all agencies and individuals interested in the questions being raised. She is willing to discuss these matters with the board, with law enforcement and with the public.

truly yours

Daniel L. Bray

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DLB/1j
enclosure