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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

March 13, 2017

Salem City Council
City of Salem
555 Liberty Road SE
Salem, OR 97301

Center for HOPE & SAFETY



Formerly Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service

Dear Mayor Bennett and members of the Salem City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide background regarding the proposed amendments to the Salem Revised Code to permit non-profit shelter for victims of domestic violence with up to 10 people in residential and commercial zones. We hope you will see that the unique nature of our program makes this change critical in order to continue to provide appropriate services to victims of violence in the Salem community.

The Center for Hope & Safety (formerly Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service) has operated an emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking for more than 38 years in Salem. In that time, nearly 16,000 children and adults have found a safe refuge where they can begin to rebuild their lives free of violence. The current shelter, which we call Winston House, is in a five-bedroom home, built nearly 100 years ago, in the Grant neighborhood.

When we decided the shelter was reaching the end of its viability, we asked the Grant Neighborhood Association to write a letter to our future Neighborhood Association. Here is what they wrote:

> *In all the years they have been here, the Winston House has been a very good neighbor. There have been no complaints about the program. It has operated quietly and efficiently to meet the needs of families in our community. The Center for Hope & Safety, and the families they serve, are considerate and respectful of the neighborhood and the people that live nearby.*
>
> *The program has always maintained their property well. In fact, the Grant Neighborhood Association presented them with a Neighborhood Beautification Award in the past because of their care and upkeep of the property.*

Due to the fact we began offering shelter so long ago, the land use requirements have changed significantly. Last year, we attempted to build in East Lancaster Neighborhood Association and found that by the time we completed the land use permitting process hundreds of individuals in Salem had been notified of the whereabouts of our proposed shelter. This made the location unviable, and after spending thousands of dollars on the project, we were forced to sell the property. The City of Salem staff have worked with us to propose this amendment to the City Code, in order to find a way to address the unique needs of a domestic violence shelter in a future location.

The following are some of the ways in which domestic violence shelters are unique:

- Safety is the highest priority. Our families do everything possible not to draw attention to themselves and do not have any guests visiting them at shelter.
- We provide everything the family needs – food, clothing, hygiene items, school supplies, etc. Often victims show up with only the clothes on their backs.
- Our families are not asked to leave during the day. In fact, the new shelter will be equipped with computers in order to conduct housing and employment searches in a safe place.
- We provide intensive case management, working with each individual and family to help them overcome barriers and challenges.
- Alcohol and drugs are not allowed on the premises (including marijuana, since we receive federal funding).
- Most of our residents do not have cars and never more than one per family. We provide bus passes and have a transport van to help residents get to appointments.

Since the City of Salem has listed homelessness as an important issue they hope to address, it is important to remember that one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children is domestic violence. In addition, women who experienced domestic violence in the past year were four times more likely to face housing instability than those who did not experience domestic violence (*American Journal of Preventative Medicine*).

The loss of a domestic violence shelter in Salem would mean that over time thousands of the women, children, and men we serve would have no refuge, leading to them living on the streets or returning to a violent home. Your support of this proposed change will likely mean the difference between life and death for some of our most vulnerable families.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Jayne Downing
Executive Director