

Friday, October 07, 2011

To Topeka and Shawnee County elected and appointed officials:

The funding battle over who will pay to prosecute domestic violence misdemeanors in Shawnee County and the City of Topeka must be resolved immediately! Statements made publicly in the last several weeks have shown a startling disregard for the gravity of these crimes.

Many, many serious and lethal domestic violence cases start as misdemeanor incidents. Nothing about a domestic violence misdemeanor crime should be minimized or taken lightly. Victims rely on the criminal justice system to hold the abuser accountable and to protect them from further harm. The current policy dispute creates a vacuum that violates the trust that victims and their families have a right to rely upon. Further, persons with disabilities and others with similar needs are statistically at much greater risk for being victims, making the increased risk for this population of Topeka citizens particularly intolerable and egregious.

We challenge the City and County to have a plan in place to protect victims. Removing domestic violence related offenses from City of Topeka ordinances is not such a plan. When the City Council meets next Tuesday, it will have been more than a month during which domestic violence perpetrators have not been accountable for their criminal actions; a month in which victims have been turned away by the system that claims to protect.

The City and the County must fund the prosecution of these cases, regardless of where they are handled. Any one of the estimated 30 cases waiting for action could be a life-or-death case for a citizen of Topeka. Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence and the Disability Rights Center sign this letter with the hope that this renewed attention to the response to domestic violence crimes is used as an opportunity to evaluate and revisit the issue in Topeka and Shawnee County. Are we succeeding in holding offenders accountable? Are we succeeding at believing and supporting victims? Are addressing victim safety?

This standoff must stop before someone is killed or seriously injured. Committing domestic violence with impunity should not be among the values of our city and county. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month; honor it.

Sincerely,

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