

Center for HOPE & SAFETY

Re: Supporting HB 2825 – Treating survivors of domestic abuse with more dignity and fairness.

Dear Chair Bynum and Members of the Committee,

Since 2015, Center for Hope and Safety has been providing supportive services to correctional facilities in Marion County as part of the Prison Rape Elimination Act. In 2018, CHS began providing services to CCCF, as well, offering emotional support on our hotline, responding to letters from AICs, providing hospital and investigation accompaniment, and meeting with survivors one-on-one to offer follow up support, safety planning and coping and healing skills.



Prior to providing PREA-related services at CCCF, we believed – based on our experience of supporting survivors in the community – that the impact of domestic violence on those who were housed at CCCF was significant. Once we were there at CCCF, speaking to survivors, our beliefs were confirmed. Even though we encountered each survivor because they came to us for support around PREA-related violence, it became apparent that many of these women came to us with an extensive trauma history related to domestic or intimate partner violence.

Though the numbers reflect that 65% of women reported abuse in a relationship at the time of arrest, our experience working with survivors housed at CCCF reflect a much higher percentage of survivors whose history prior to incarceration includes domestic violence. It makes sense to us as advocates why these numbers are underreported. Our experience shows that abusers often use tactics to isolate and silence victims, making a victim believe that no one will believe them if they come forward. Abusers often involve their victims in the criminal justice system as a way to diminish a survivor's credibility and eliminate access to resources. Our experience shows that victims are often manipulated into taking the fall for their abuser or are coerced into participating in a crime because they are threatened, or their children or families are threatened with violence.

These were the stories I heard, over and over again, as I sat with survivors as they processed their trauma around abuse that happened – or was still happening – in their relationships. I sat with women who had only just begun to understand that their relationship was abusive, that the abuse wasn't their fault, and that there were those around them who *would* believe their story.

I can think of many survivors currently incarcerated at CCCF who would benefit from the chance to share their story. I think of one I first supported when she came to us in the community, seeking services and wanting to flee her abuser. I supported her in county jail as she awaited trial for a crime she was coerced to participate in because her abuser threatened to take her child away from her. I supported her through her sentencing, where she bravely shared her story and was still convicted for the full extent of the crime. I supported her at CCCF, as she processed both her trauma and the grief she felt being separated from her child.

This story is not an isolated incident. The number of survivors of domestic violence currently in custody is high. These survivors deserve support and a chance to tell their story if they choose.

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