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Dear Salida City Council members,

I am writing this letter of concern on behalf of The Alliance Board of Directors. The Alliance is the only agency dedicated to serving victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Chaffee County.

Following reports that the newly hired city administrator had recent charges of felony menacing with a weapon that occurred during a domestic violence incident, we feel it is important to provide education about the dynamics of domestic violence to help promote awareness, advocate for survivors and encourage social change. Working together, we can create a community that values health and well-being, and does not tolerate domestic violence in any form.

While we do not know all the facts of this particular case, we can share known facts about domestic violence. Domestic Violence is a well-researched phenomena and it is important to include the information below when having these conversations in our community.

1. Domestic Violence is both prevalent and under reported.

Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behaviors that one partner uses to get power over the other. One out of every four women worldwide will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women – more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. 1/2 of all homeless women and children in the U.S. are fleeing from domestic violence. It is more comforting to believe that abuse only happens in certain "problem" families, ethnic minorities, in cities, or to people different from ourselves. Research shows that abuse pervades every ethnic, class, geographic and social strata. It is not the social standing, the amount of stress lived under or the company kept which makes an abuser, but the internal need for power, the belief that they have the right to control someone else. In the last 5 years, The Alliance has served over 1,200 adult and child victims of domestic violence and sexual assault locally.

2. The presence of guns increases risk in domestic violence situations.



The presence of a gun in a Domestic Violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed. In an average month, 50 American women are shot to death by intimate partners, and many more are injured. Abusers use guns to threaten and control their victims, even if they never pull the trigger. About 4.5 million American women alive today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner. Colorado statutes recognize these increased risk factors and cases with domestic violence distinctions have increased accountability for offenders including firearms prohibition and domestic violence treatment requirements.

3. Offender Behaviors;

Domestic Violence constitutes a pattern of abusive behavior that includes the use or threat of violence and intimidation for the purpose of gaining power and control over another person. There is also a common belief that Domestic Violence is the result of poor anger management skills or that it is a one-off incident. A violent event is seldom an isolated incident, but part of a pattern which increases in both frequency and severity over time. Most often it is part of an ongoing means of establishing and maintaining control over another person. Research has also shown that anger management is an ineffective treatment. Offenders often demonstrate control over anger in other relationships or in other environments such as at work or in social scenarios.

There are known personality traits, characteristics, and behavioral patterns of offenders that contribute to the power and control dynamic that make it difficult to leave the abusive relationship. Abusers are often charming, generous and well-presented people who can hold positions of social standing. These dysfunctional behaviors of power and control may not be visible outside the home. This Jekyll and Hyde tendency of the abuser can further confuse and frighten the person being abused, as the person in private is so very different to the person everyone else sees. It can also mean that when the person being abused finally does try to tell his/her friends, family or acquaintances of the abuse, he or she is not believed, because the person they are describing simply doesn't fit the image portrayed in public. Some abusers are more prone to being violent when drunk, but many more abuse when completely sober. Alcohol and drugs may increase the violence, but they do not cause it. Alcohol and drug abuse are separate issues from abuse. Being intoxicated is not an excuse for abuse; there is no excuse for abuse.

In conclusion, this letter serves to provide education and promote awareness within our community. As an organization, we strive to elevate survivor's voices and needs. We see incredibly resilient individuals working through barriers and trauma every day. We can only imagine what they feel when abusive behaviors are dismissed or minimized by leaders in our



community. We remain available for support and education for our community on these complex issues.

Sincerely,
Rachel Holder, LCSW
Executive Director
The Alliance

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