DATE

The Honorable FIRST NAME LAST NAME

Pennsylvania Senate / Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Harrisburg, PA

Dear Senator/Representative INSERT LAST NAME,

On behalf of A Woman’s Place (AWP) and the over 3,000 victims served in Bucks County each year, I am writing to urge you to support an expansion to lifesaving free and confidential services made possible by domestic violence service funding from the Department of Human Services.

**As the General Assembly considers priorities in this year’s budget, please make family safety a priority by supporting Governor Wolf’s proposed $1.5 million increase for additional domestic violence services and adding $700,000 for civil legal representation.**

I join AWP and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) in urging members of the General Assembly to pass a budget that includes Governor Wolf’s proposed – and critically needed – expansion to domestic violence services for state FY 2015-2016. The expansion in funding would provide an additional $1.5 million to Pennsylvania’s network of 60 domestic violence centers. The proposed state budget line item of $16.9 million would specifically fund the indispensible services of pro bono civil legal representation, medical advocacy, emergency relocation, safe housing and shelter for victims and their children.

In reality, the prevalence of domestic violence and increased public awareness has created a need that is far greater than the proposed expansion to services. Media attention to the issue of domestic violence following cases in the NFL and other sports teams has fortunately raised awareness of services but also increased demand.

In 2014 alone, there were 6,152 unmet requests for shelter statewide. Pennsylvania domestic violence centers do not always know what happens when a survivor courageously calls a stranger to ask for a bed or other help when services are not available. However, when polled, 60 percent of centers report that victims are forced to return to their abuser, 32 percent report victims become homeless, and 8 percent report that families are forced to live in their cars.

**In Bucks County, there were 420 unmet requests for shelter in 2014.**

Access to specialized pro bono civil legal representation is a top need for victims and survivors across the Commonwealth. Recently, 20 domestic violence centers submitted applications for civil legal representation funding, but there was only enough money to fund 12 of those applicants due to a shortfall in state funding. This leaves victims in most of the state without access to civil legal representation. Without an expansion to domestic violence services funding in this year’s budget, hundreds of domestic violence victims will lose their pro bono representation and will most likely be forced to continue legal proceedings pro se. This is why AWP is joining PCADV is requesting an additional $700,000 for domestic violence service funding to provide civil legal representation funds for the eight eligible applicants that are currently unfunded.

**AWP’s Civil Legal Representation (CLR) Program has successfully served Bucks County for over a decade and is at risk due to the funding shortfall. In the last year, holistic relief was provided to 88 clients in 126 cases. On average, the program serves 34 clients each month on 42 cases, with approximately 2-6 new clients per month depending on the complexity of the caseload. As a result of representation by AWP’s CLR Program, in just the last year, clients were awarded $438,718 in support and equitable distribution – an incredible return on investment.**

Thank you for your continued support of victims in Pennsylvania and Bucks County. Thank you also for prioritizing family safety, the proposed $1.5 million for additional domestic violence services, and adding $700,000 for civil legal representation.

Sincerely,

INSERT YOUR NAME

INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION