

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

Dear Councilmember Kelly,

I just left you a voicemail with this information and I can make myself available to talk any time today if you would like more information. My cell phone is 202.812.0554.

I called, and am writing today about the City Council's important decision to purchase a hotel for victims of family violence.

As you know, SAFE currently does not have enough shelter beds for those in need of immediate shelter from family violence – let alone all the people that are making the impossible choice between staying in an abusive home or facing homelessness. We are deeply grateful that the City has expressed the intent to purchase a hotel with the explicit intent to operate it as a shelter for family violence victims.

And we are so pleased that SAFE was selected to operate the hotel. Even without a hotel building from which to operate, we are now less than two weeks in and are already sheltering 28 people specifically through this contract. We have established the first of several agreements to rent rooms at local hotels and also some large multi-bedroom homes. While this is not the most financially viable long-term solution to provide shelter, it is a wonderful start to sheltering victims from our waiting list!

We were disappointed to learn that the hotel in District 4 that was to be used for this purpose can no longer be used for the family violence shelter. When the hotel in northwest Austin was suggested instead, we quickly began studying its feasibility. We spoke with APD Victim Services, our counterpart in Williamson County, our staff, and most importantly our staff that work with the criminal justice process. What we learned is that there are significant drawbacks to using a hotel that is located outside of Travis County. We are especially concerned about jurisdictional issues. Travis County has the best protective order system in Texas. SAFE has longstanding, trusting relationships with schools, law enforcement systems and more in Travis County – relationships that have taken us decades to build. And Williamson County doesn't afford the same protections for undocumented immigrants. While we are excited to offer a shelter further away from our existing sites in East Austin, we strongly believe that operating out of a hotel in Williamson County is not in the best interest of Austin survivors.

SAFE respectfully requests and recommends that the City purchase a different hotel in Travis County to help victims of family violence find safety and work toward a future without violence. We do not think there is a perfect hotel, and we will remain open to all opportunities as we work side by side with City Departments to identify and make ready a suitable hotel. Our strong recommendation, built on our 47 years of experience operating a holistic family violence program for Austinites, is that this shelter be located within Travis County.

Thank you for your consideration – and please let me know if you or your staff have any questions.

Best wishes,

Piper Stege Nelson

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