

Counseling service extended through June

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Despite surprising arguments against providing counseling for domestic abusers by the lone woman on the Butte-Silver Bow council of commissioners, the body voted last Wednesday to extend an agreement with Community, Corrections and Counseling Services (CCCS) through the fiscal year that ends June 30 at a cost of \$1,167 per month for April, May and June.

The contract will be evaluated as part of the budget process for the 2005-2006 fiscal period.

CCCS is a non-profit organization of which former commissioner Mike Thatcher is chief executive officer.

The organization, at its own expense, has provided counseling to batterers ordered to treatment by the court, for free for several years and at the same time provided training for counselors at its own expense. There were no objections noted to that arrangement by any commissioner.

But, last Wednesday (4/20/05), Commissioner Charlie O'Leary raised objections and said that batterers should have to pay for their own court-ordered treatment, that the law does not provide that the local government provide treatment and that batterers who don't pay should be jailed in lieu of payment.

Commissioner Laura Lee Dunlap, who once worked in the county attorney's office as a lawyer, agreed with O'Leary and said the local government is not required to pay for the counseling.

County Attorney Bob McCarthy countered that the treatment is "not for the batterers," but for the women and children involved. "At least 90 percent of the batterers are returned to the home. Without any treatment, they are guaranteed to repeat the behavior," McCarthy said.

He also pointed out that, as O'Leary wanted, if batterers are allowed to choose counselors of their choice, the batterers don't have money, don't want to go to counseling, don't believe their behavior warrants treatment and either would not seek treatment or would not pay for it if they did seek it.

McCarthy also pointed out that the U.S. has not had debtors' prisons for centuries to counter O'Leary's arguments that batterers who do not pay should go to jail.

As the discussion wore on, Commissioner Mike Kerns became increasingly concerned. Finally, he brought out the proverbial sledge hammer, smashed the boulder sitting on the table that no one spoke about the sprayed debris all over O'Leary.

In the early 1990s O'Leary was censured for conflict of interest in some land dealings by the council and he has not been able to get over it.

Thatcher was on the council, as was Kerns, and both men voted for the censure.

"Ever since you were censured, Mr. O'Leary," Kerns said, "every time something comes up that involves CCCS, you, with your vendetta, attempt to disparage CCCS and block the issue. You have cost this government untold money by blocking the entry into a multi-year contract with CCCS to provide food and transportation after the jail burned, you projected that the new jail could get by with one cook when a CCCS bid for food was discussed and now we have three cooks and a supervisor."

McCarthy told the commissioners they could reject the CCCS contract if they wished, but he cautioned them that advocacy groups such as the battered women's shelter and other groups that fear for the lives of women and children certainly will make their wishes known at future council meetings.

When the vote was taken Commissioners Ted Bury, Rocko Mulcahy, Wally Fraz, Kerns, John Sorich, Joe Lee, Mike Sheehy and Jim Fay voted for extending the contract. Commissioners O'Leary and Dunlap voted against the extension.