

Senator Dick Dever, Chairman  
North Dakota State Legislature  
Senate Appropriations Committee, Human Resources Division  
600 East Boulevard Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58505

Chairman Dever and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

Good morning,

My name is Darianne Johnson, and I am the Executive Director of the Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Center (DVRCC) in Dickinson.

I was born and raised on a farm in southwest North Dakota where I thought I lived the perfect existence because I didn't know any different, I guess.

In September I will start my 23<sup>rd</sup> year at DVRCC. It seems like it's been a lifetime, but it also seems like just yesterday. I want to share some stories today from my work, because so many of the people our agency has helped over the years didn't have a voice. As an executive director and an advocate, one of my roles is to give a voice to those who cannot speak. Some of these situations might be hard to hear, but as you can imagine, it does not begin to compare to living through it.

I remember the first client that I worked with, I remember her name and how badly she had been beaten and her crying while telling me her story. I remember her 2-year-old daughter who sat stoically with her little hand on her mom's arm, not shedding a tear. I realized at that point that this was "normal" and that she didn't know any different, I guess.

I remember receiving the call from a young man who had been gang raped by a group of young women out of spite for something that he had done. I hung up the phone with him...not knowing if I made a difference or if he committed suicide as he told me he was going to do.

I remember receiving a call from the hospital. They said they had a young woman there who was sexually assaulted and could we please send an advocate. When we got there the doctor told us that she would need to be sedated before he could do an examination. He said that ethically he would need to do this because there was so much damage the pain would be excruciating- We, as advocates took shifts at the hospital as there was no one there with her and we did not want her to wake up alone.

I remember the tiny elderly spitfire woman who was raped in her own home in her own bed. She was black and blue from head to toe, bruises everywhere.

And I remember the staff person who submitted her resignation the Monday that we came to work and received a call from the hospital that there were 2, 2-year olds at the hospital that had been sexually assaulted. With tears streaming down her face, she told me "I can't do this anymore, why would anyone want to hurt a baby?"

Advocacy is hard. Advocates who work in this field are truly special people and work tirelessly to help people when they are in crisis and beyond. We are here today asking the state for help so that we can be there in the future as well. What if one of these people that I have talked about today were a family member of yours? I hope your answer is that you would do anything in your power to help them put the pieces of their life back together again.

All of you in this room also have difficult jobs. And you also have power. I'm asking you to share that power and your voice with the voiceless and fully fund our proposal with the department of health and human services.

Thank you.