

THE RECORD

Bergen funds wives shelter

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By Craig Reiss
Staff Writer

The Bergen County Board of Freeholders yesterday voted to give Shelter Our Sisters Inc. (SOS) funds to care for battered wives — provided the program seeks to reunite the abused women with their husbands.

The proviso was criticized by SOS founder Sandy Ramos, who said it would help create "a new generation of cripples."

Whether or not SOS will agree to the stipulation depends on how strictly it is interpreted.

"Healthy parts of the family should be kept together," Ms. Ramos said. "If a woman wants to go back to her husband, we won't lock her up. But if she's been humiliated, beaten, and tortured, we're not going to tell her to go back just to save her family. Our goal is to keep the women and children safe."

Members of the county's Community Action Program (CAP), which runs a similar program for battered women, have complained that Ms. Ramos and SOS members seek to dissuade women from returning to their spouses. Freeholder Joan Lesemann, who sponsored the provision, said she wanted the clause to help monitor "what we are doing to bring the father into the program. Are we keeping the family together?"

Mrs. Lesemann did not say whether CAP members had influenced her opinion.

Overseeing counseling

Frances Treanor, a member of the SOS advisory board, said that a task force established by the Bergen County Title 20 Coalition — a group formed to recommend either CAP or SOS for the funds — would oversee counseling for husbands.

The freeholder resolution, which provides \$19,737 of a \$75,887 grant under Title 20 of the federal Social Security Act — also stipulated that the proposed shelter must meet local zoning and housing requirements.

But Ms. Ramos said that she does not intend to tell the freeholders or local officials the location of the shelter to protect the women from their husbands.

A third stipulation required SOS to meet with CAP members to determine how duplication of services could be

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avoided. The joint meeting was held Dec. 29, but no compromise was reached.

According to a report by Loretta Weinberg, clerk of the Board of Freeholders, who moderated the joint meeting, the conference disclosed that CAP — which received a \$174,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor in May — had spent all of its funds that were designated for social services, including the renting of a shelter. Women treated through CAP have been sheltered in motels. The remainder of CAP's grant must be used to create jobs.

CAP concern

CAP representatives have expressed concern that SOS will become the official agency for future Title 20 funding instead of the county's antipoverty agency.

According to Eleanor Clark, a CAP member at the joint meeting, "You might as well forget about the CAP program if Sandy Ramos gets that money."

Mrs. Clark also said the freeholders were committing a hatchet job on CAP by giving the money to SOS. She said the freeholders had refused to deal with SOS last April, but had inexplicably reversed themselves.

Freeholder Doris Mahalick, who yesterday abstained on the resolution, agreed with Mrs. Clark. She said the board had decided last year to support the CAP program instead of SOS. "We had the same option six months ago," Mrs. Mahalick said. "Why didn't we pick Sandy [Ramos] then? What has changed?"

One change has been the determination by the state Division of Youth and Family Services — which administers the Title 20 money — to fund SOS instead of CAP. If SOS does not receive the money, the funds will be lost to Bergen County.