

Bay City Times (MI)

Tuesday, June 20, 2006

Women's Shelters Stand on Their Rights, and Rightly So – An Editorial

For women who have been beaten, raped or terrorized, a women's shelter is a safe haven.

At least, it ought to be.

But an incident on May 8 at a Bad Axe shelter called SafePlace called that into question after a shelter worker was arrested for not letting a police lieutenant in during an ambulance call.

Shelter workers called 911 for medical help for a resident who was having back pain.

Bad Axe police said their officers respond to ambulance calls when they can.

The officer, in plain clothes, arrived shortly before ambulance personnel.

A shelter worker refused to let him in, even after he returned with an assistant Huron County prosecutor.

The worker was arrested and charged with two counts of resisting and obstructing police, a felony.

Just because she would not let a police officer into a private residence.

A women's shelter is where women, and quite often their children, live. It's where they have sought refuge from the people – most often men – who have traumatized them. For however long they live in a shelter, it is home.

And that should be respected by everyone.

Especially police.

The Bill of Rights is very clear about that.

The Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is, "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures," unless officials have a search warrant or a warrant for their arrest.

The Bad Axe police lieutenant had neither.

The shelter worker was under no obligation to let him in.

It's a common policy among domestic violence shelters in Michigan. Nobody and that includes police officers, who wants to be let into a shelter is automatically admitted.

That's the policy at the Bay Area Women's Shelter in Bay County, for example. Used by other shelters around Michigan, it's the guideline suggested by a state agency, the Michigan Domestic Violence and Prevention Treatment Board, part of the Department of Human Services.

The Bay Area shelter's director says police in Bay County respect the privacy policy. The shelter does urge its residents to cooperate with police, and to respond to police at the door with arrest warrants.

It is a good relationship. A legal one that respects officers trying to do their jobs, and the privacy rights of people who have had more than enough trauma in their lives.

In Bad Axe, police entered SafePlace after the worker was handcuffed, and interviewed the women living there.

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